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MEMORIES AND FRIENDS



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# MEMORIES AND FRIENDS

BY A. C. BENSON

MASTER OF MAGDALENE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE  
LL.D., C.V.O.

*Thou turnest man to destruction : again Thou  
sayest, Come again, ye children of men.*

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1924



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## NOTE

OF the following essays, "Henry James," "J. D. Bouchier," and "Reginald John Smith" have appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine*; "J. L. Joynes" and "Dr. Warre" in the *Empire Review*; "Blanche Warre-Cornish" in the *London Mercury*. My thanks are due to the respective Editors and proprietors for leave kindly given to reproduce them.





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## P R E F A C E

THE following volume contains some sketches and impressions of certain interesting and striking personalities with whom I have been brought into close contact, in the course of a varied though not particularly eventful life.

They make no claim to be complete or even necessarily true impressions, but they are *my* impressions, faithfully recorded.

My heroes and heroines did not all attain to great prominence, but in every case they were men and women who showed a perfectly distinct and remarkable handling of life, neither imitative nor conventional, and I think it may be claimed for them that they at least attained the distinction of having been, in a small or great circle, *figures* of significance,—that unaccountable pre-eminence which, as Henry James once pointed out, comes so firmly and decisively to people often of no great note or effectiveness, and which yet passes by, no less decisively, many people of far greater reputation for intelligence and virtue.

Distinctness—that is the quality which in our



nebulous and conventional world rescues here and there a man or woman from the common obscurity.

As life goes on, not only do the possibilities of launching out into new experiences become more limited, but irreparable things begin to happen—tragedies which no amount of rhetoric or imagination can disguise, losses which sweep away whole sections and provinces of life. It must be so; the more absorbed that one is in one's interests and pursuits, the more shatteringly are such things felt.

It seemed so easy, when life was comparatively unimpaired and opportunities still so unexhausted, to make a compact philosophy out of it all, and to point out the compensating way in which everything worked out; and a philosophy at least indicated the way in which one wished and found it possible to live. But gradually the horizon begins to close in, and things which will not accommodate themselves to any philosophy but that of faith begin to occur.

Then, I think, the mind, retracing the old wanderings and explorations, begins to perceive how little performance and definite achievement, either in oneself, or in others, has really counted; and how much time that might have been vivaciously spent has been wasted in detailed ambitions and petty designs that have led to no particular goal; and how lightly one has reckoned that in which the true richness of life consists—namely, the distinct and emphatic personalities with and among whom it has been permitted to one to live; how little one treasured



them, how permanent they seemed to be, how much one unconsciously depended upon them, how constantly and desperately one misses them.

And then, too, one realises how much energy and force the persons who achieved solid successes were forced to put into definite occupations, and how little they had to spare for the mere business of living ; then one step farther, and a veil falls from one's eyes ; one sees what a boundless debt one owes to the friends who gave generously and lavishly their best and most beautiful qualities to life itself, and cast their bread upon the waters with an unsparing hand.

It is that debt that I desire to pay. Of the friends whom I have here tried to depict, two or three achieved eminence, not by sedulous scheming, but in virtue of great and impressive qualities. But most of them left no deep mark upon the world, because their whole force and charm and animation were used, naturally and uncalculatingly, in enriching the texture of life and bestowing happiness, with a total disregard of all lesser personal motives, on a small circle.

I believe this to be the best kind of biography, and the most worth recording : yet it is infinitely more difficult, because one has so little that is precise and definite to relate ; though even if one can convey no clear and enlivening impression of these beautiful and chosen natures to those who never came into contact with them, yet the friends who knew and loved them, in whose lives the loss of them has



left gaps that can hardly be filled, will be glad to read the record, and to revive the memories of men and women whom they honoured and held most dear.

ARTHUR C. BENSON.

MAGDALENE COLLEGE,  
CAMBRIDGE.



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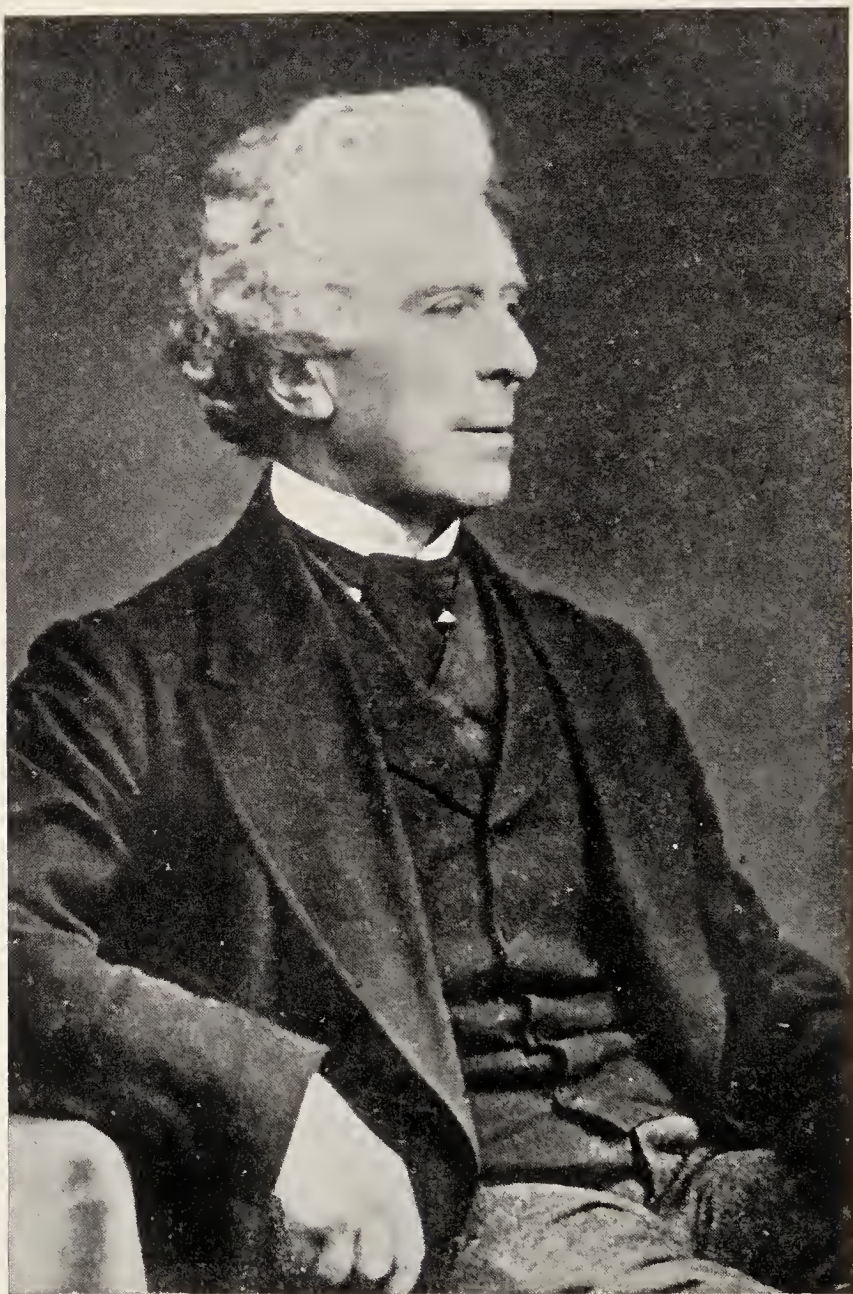


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THOMAS HARE.  
Circa 1870.

*G. T. Jones, Surbiton.*



# MEMORIES AND FRIENDS

## I

THOMAS HARE

## I

IN the sixties, my father's two sisters, Eleanor and Ada Benson, had a small and presumably select boarding-school at Surbiton—Sydney Lodge, it was called. My Aunt Eleanor, a tall, fresh-coloured, handsome woman, at once dignified and impulsive, was the presiding genius. She had had a training in an art-school, in oil-painting and water-colour, and was at all events a highly accomplished copyist—we had several of her pictures—but with no irresistible vocation for art. I imagine that she interviewed parents, managed the household, taught the girls drawing, and by virtue of a remarkable combination of high temper and generously lavish affection, governed her little kingdom with remarkable success. My Aunt Ada was a much more intellectual woman, with great enthusiasm and real force of character—a born teacher, as she afterwards proved as head of the Norwich and Oxford High Schools. Sydney Lodge was certainly a very happy and peaceful place, the girls were well taught and looked after, and were devoted to their mistresses.



We used sometimes to go over as children to spend a domestic festival at Sydney Lodge, a birthday or other anniversary—a day spent in an earthly paradise. We were petted alike by aunts and pupils, games arranged for us, pictures drawn for us—I still have a sketch of a flaming crimson bird, with black wings and beak and a roguish yellow eye, perched on a branch, and holding a large green seed or berry in its beak, painted for me on a wet morning at Sydney Lodge by a pretty chestnut-haired girl, whose smiling demeanour I can still recall. Then came a rich lunch, with games to follow. Only one sad day there I can recollect, when, as we sate in ecstasy, a curious, monotonous cry or moan came from an upper room—from a poor servant-girl, we gathered, the sudden death of whose mother had been broken to her that morning by Aunt Eleanor, and who was preparing for departure. I remember no sense of pity, only of dull vexation at the day being clouded by such intrusive grief.

## II

Not long after we were told that Aunt Eleanor was going to be married to a certain Mr. Thomas Hare. It seemed strange and unaccountable to us that our delightful aunt should exchange the lively, companionable glories of Sydney Lodge for anything so commonplace as matrimony. But older people were unaccountable, and had no real sense of values!

Later on—we were then living at Lincoln—the happy pair came to pay us a visit. Aunt Eleanor we were glad enough to see, but the only real dilemma was what we were to call Mr. Hare. Was he to be Uncle Thomas? Eventually it was decided that he was to be plain Mr. Hare; and so it remained to the end.



In due course they arrived, and we rushed to the drawing-room to be warmly and vigorously embraced by Aunt Eleanor, and to be presented to what appeared to us to be a very old gentleman indeed, who was standing on the hearthrug, talking with my father.

Well, about one point there was certainly no doubt, that he was an extremely handsome and distinguished-looking old man, his face pale and bronzed, an aquiline nose, clean-shaven, showing a firm-lipped mouth and well-developed chin, his eyes blue and kindly, the whole face deeply-lined and furrowed, a little nervous twitch about the right eyelid, with a fine, upstanding shock of snow-white hair; the look of a man who had worked hard, thought hard, and suffered, but full of quiet kindliness. The general aspect, I should say, of an aged and distinguished ecclesiastic. Properly arrayed, he would have made a noble and courtly prelate.

As it was, he was very precisely dressed in a blue frock-coat and buff nankeen waistcoat with dark grey trousers; small feet, rather rugged and laborious-looking hands.

He was certainly a very silent figure—few words and much to the point, not intervening in talk until further abstention from speech would have been embarrassing, an omniscient man, dismissing a complicated subject with a modest definiteness. His voice was rather thin and weak. He was plainly and obviously devoted to my aunt; his eyes used to seek her out and rest upon her, as if depending upon her vitality and eager affection; and she, too, full of small cares and precautions for his comfort and ease. Their mutual affection was a beautiful thing.



I remember no incident of their visit except a little dinner-party at which the austere Dean Blakesley treated Mr. Hare with marked and visible deference, as a man of note ; and a Sunday walk, when I found myself walking beside my new uncle, smiling and silent, and humming, as was his wont, a little tune half under his breath. After careful consideration, with childish priggishness, feeling that he must need to be fed with abstruse questions, I decided to ask him how long he thought the coal in England would last, having heard some visitor discourse on the subject a few days before. Mr. Hare looked at me with a twinkle of amusement, and said, "I think I may have a fire to sit by for the duration of my life, but I can't be sure that you will have one when you are my age." I felt he was rather trifling with an important subject, but he seemed quite content with my company, so we walked on and said no more.

Mr. Hare, I may say, was born in 1806, and was sixty-six when he married my aunt. He had been called to the bar in 1833, practised in the Chancery Courts, and was the editor of the well-known *Hare's Law Reports*. In the year of his second marriage he was elected a bencher of the Inner Temple. He published many pamphlets on political, legal, and social questions ; but his great work was a book on *Representation* in which he devised a system which aimed at securing proportional representation in the House of Commons for all parties, including minorities. The system was warmly commended by Mill, and Fawcett issued a pamphlet in 1860, entitled "Mr. Hare's Reform Bill simplified and explained." Mr. Hare became an Inspector of



Charities in 1853, and in 1872 Assistant Charity Commissioner, with a seat on the Board. "He was conspicuous," says the *Dictionary of National Biography*, "for great industry, wide interest in life, and clearness of intellectual vision."

## III

When I went to school with my elder brother Martin at East Sheen, the Hares, who lived near Surbiton, were not very far away. And I remember one amazing Saturday, when we were sent for after school-hours were over, at noon, and found in the drawing-room our magnificent and formidable Headmaster, Mr. Waterfield, talking to my aunt, who in a velvet mantle and with an orange feather in her black velvet bonnet seemed a match for any potentate. Mr. Waterfield and my aunt were old friends; he told us that we were to run away and pack our things for Sunday, and that my aunt would carry us off for long leave, till Monday morning. It seemed too good to be true. But we were soon bowling away in a carriage with my aunt, with a portmanteau on the box, and were presently at Surbiton. Then we drove out, among bare pastures and ploughed fields and market gardens, to the little village of Hook, where we turned sharp to the left, by a rather shame-faced little church, and in a minute drove in at the gate of Gosbury Hill.

It was a pretty and secluded spot in those days, now, I expect, engulfed in villas. There were some fields attached to the house, with an astonishing show of wild daffodils—I do not remember ever seeing them grow more richly—running up to a little eminence crowned by two or three lofty poplars,



now dead and gone, with some nice timber all about. The house was a very curious, irregular building, at all sorts of levels, with an old front covered with wistaria, a pleasant sunk flower-garden, carved out of the rising ground, the whole overtopped by a not very dignified tower, of yellow brick with a pointed slate roof; the general effect quaint and original, but the tower rather irrepressibly tawdry.

Below it were outbuildings: a big poultry-run, a hay-barn, and a cattle-shed—the apparatus of a little pleasure-farm.

The odd thing about the place was that to make the most of its pretty fields it was thrust into the very corner of the grounds; the back windows looked out perfectly straight, with no intervening strip of garden, into a big ploughland, with a green lane winding away towards Esher.

But we were in no mood to criticise; it was like heaven to be transported to a pleasant, civilised house, with books, pictures, a piano, flowers, from the bare schoolrooms and cheerless cubicles of Temple Grove. People dropped in to tea—vague-robed and bonneted ladies, tall, shy girls. My aunt dearly loved company and talk. She kept us beside her, popped cake on our plates, pushed us jam, looked after her guests, and a rich tide of gossip rose and fell, my aunt now declaiming with passionate emphasis, now listening with open eyes and parted lips to some tale of intricate but unknown significance. We were duly presented, and the tone in which my aunt said “my two nephews” was in itself a benediction.

Then, when the rout melted away, we were shown all over the house, and a very delicious place it was



to a childish mind. We had been having tea in a big, low hall—it was an old house, once a farm, to which my uncle had added greatly. Out of the hall opened a long double drawing-room, with old-fashioned papers, birds and roses and perpendicular trellises, and many blue-covered armchairs and sofas. Then a little austere room, with some armorial bearings carved on the mantelpiece, which my aunt called her work-room, and where she said *she must never be interrupted*; but that was not difficult, for she seldom entered it, except to fetch away a basket, or garden-gloves, or large scissors for cropping off roses. Then, also opening out of the hall, was an arched door, very ecclesiastical, which actually led into a small private chapel—Mr. Hare was a devout, old-fashioned High-Churchman. It had some quarries of grisaille glass, a reading-desk for Mr. Hare, little Gothic seats down each side, encaustic tiles, and bare brick walls, with, I think, a dim religious picture or two. To make this still more enchanting, a tiny window, called “the squint,” looked down into the chapel from a bedroom overhead, through which, if you peered, you could just discern Mr. Hare’s white head in the reading-desk.

Then a long passage with encaustic tiles and stained-glass windows zigzagged uphill, with little flights of steps, to the dining-room, which was a big room, opening on the garden, on the first floor. How the food got there from the kitchen I cannot say, for it was all very mysterious. Then there were a good many bedrooms, but how approached I hardly know. The Gothic in which it was built was of a decidedly amateur order, and highly rococo. But youth values what is curious and unusual far



more than what is solemn and beautiful, and it seemed to us a perfectly enchanting place ; and, best of all, one felt that Aunt Eleanor did not only give us a conventional welcome but was eagerly and almost excitedly delighted that we were there.

Mr. Hare arrived in due course from London—he was then Charity Commissioner—shook us warmly by the hand, said nothing whatever, but somehow mutely communicated to us his own comfortable welcome.

Dinner followed in due course, an ample meal—Mr. Hare liked savoury homely fare—and then we had a surprise. We asked questions about the house, which he answered with modest creative pride—all his own design ! And then he volunteered a question. Did we know a house at East Sheen, just opposite the west end of the church where we attended service ? We did indeed. It was an oldish villa, in a walled garden, with a market-garden behind, a fantastic little château, with two pepper-box spired turrets, and over-loaded with perky ornaments. Well, he had actually designed that—his own idea—and had lived there for many years.

Then we went to the drawing-room, and Mr. Hare read a big, dry looking book by the fire, while we played a game with my aunt. She played with desperate intentness, but distracted by the perpetual need of seeing that Mr. Hare was comfortable, and the light at the right angle ; and then we were smartly despatched to bed, with warm hugs and embraces, and told we must be down for prayers, to which Mr. Hare from his chair added, “ But there won’t be any lines to do if you aren’t ! ”

Then came a blissful Sunday ; service in the little



church, morning and evening, with Aunt Eleanor, I seem to recollect, marshalling in a little class of meek Sunday-school girls, with the air of Napoleon at Austerlitz. A walk with Mr. Hare, every inch of the domain visited and explored; the poplars, it was believed, were the one salvation, as landmark and guide, to fainting wanderers in suburban roads.

There followed another inroad of callers, rather solemnised by Sunday, and a cold meal in the evening, overshadowed, alas! by the sense of the grim return to slavery; and next morning the sad breakfast, a tip each from Mr. Hare, given as though he were passing the black spot, like Stevenson's pirates; a hamper thrust into the carriage by my aunt, and a drive with an old deaf coachman to catch a train, which we missed; and found ourselves back in purgatory, and in deep disgrace as well—a dreadful vicissitude of life!

## IV

In 1878 I paid a longer visit still. It was just after the death of my brother Martin, who died as a boy at Winchester. My father and mother had to go back to Cornwall, but did not like the idea of my going back straight to Eton. Aunt Eleanor of course intervened, as she always gallantly did whenever she could help or relieve. I was to move to them at once, and stay as long as was thought advisable. I was in an entirely bewildered and half-terrified frame of mind, having been suddenly and for the first time confronted with tragedy, and having lost my most familiar companion.

Neither my aunt nor Mr. Hare said anything about it; indeed, there was nothing to be said. The only thing to hope for was that life should rise again and



brim the empty channels. But there were two inmates of the house who were new to me. One was a son of Mr. Hare's, a handsome, dark-haired man, who held some sort of Colonial appointment, and was home on leave. He died not long ago as Sir Lancelot Hare, having risen to be Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, with conspicuous success. He was incredibly good to me, took me out walks, talked quietly and interestingly, and drew me on to talk too. The other was a new little daughter, my aunt's only child, then I suppose about four years old. I think she was the most delightful child I ever remember, extremely pretty, flaxen-haired and blue-eyed, always cheerful, and deeply interested in any game I could devise. I spent long hours playing with her in her nursery, and rambling about the grounds with her. Mr. Hare and my aunt simply idolised her; Mr. Hare himself overflowed with silent kindness. He used to plan out walks for me to take, tell me of interesting places to see—such as Chessington Hall, where Fanny Burney stayed so often with her old friend “Daddy” Crisp. He used to look out books he thought I might like, and when he was at home, used to stroll about with me, and even indulge in little reminiscences of his early days, and of the interesting men he had known, such as J. S. Mill and Carlyle. One day he clambered up with me into the little turret, where I had never been before. It was approached by a steep ladder; and to my intense surprise, the tiny sun-warmed room at the top, with its four dusty slits of windows, was fitted up with wooden shelves, a deal table, and a sink, as a little chemical laboratory for a son of his—and the shelves were still full of bottles, retorts,



tubes, and jars of chemicals. He looked out a book of simple chemical experiments, and put me on my guard against certain explosive and corrosive substances. I was to tell him in the evening exactly what experiments I had tried, with a note of results ; and there I spent many busy hours, among terrible fumes and stench— but with no disastrous results but once, when I added some vitriol to a carelessly graduated concoction. In a puff of poisonous foam the contents of the mixing bowl flew out upon the floor, happily sparing my face and hands, but sprinkling a new suit with fluid, the stains of which, to my horror, in the course of the day became of a rich crimson colour. Mr. Hare told me to apply ammonia, and the crimson spots disappeared, only a month later to reveal themselves as neat holes in the fabric !

Meanwhile my aunt herself took me in tow at all unoccupied hours. The materials were simple enough, but she made it all into an urgent and momentous business, full of mysterious secrets. “ If I can get *a moment* before lunch,” she would say, “ I shall want you to come and help me to cut some flowers for this afternoon ; and then the fowls must be physicked—how can I work that in ? What a comfort to have a big nephew to make a slave of ! I don’t know what I should do without you, Arthur dear ! ” She certainly filled her days to the brim, hurrying off to the village, sweeping down to the stable, losing her temper, making it up with prompt and generous apologies—“ I shall *never* forgive myself, speaking to Mrs. Caird [the laundress] as I did this morning—I must go and beg her pardon *at once*.”

There were many small hospitalities—a garden-party, I remember, with kindly, unemphatic people



drifting about, and Aunt Eleanor flashing to and fro, stately, imperious, full of concern and command, eagerly, obviously, voraciously enjoying every instant and every situation. I adored my magnificent aunt with all my heart! She had a way of suddenly and effusively kissing one, as one sat reading in a chair, which was as charming as it was disconcerting. I recollect a morning when Mr. Hare, whose digestion was not strong, would eat no breakfast but a bit of toast, when my aunt had provided some specially savoury dish for his delectation. "Well, I won't say anything, but I am disappointed! And then you will *die* of hunger before you get to the office. No, I can't eat anything either! Arthur, if you have done, will you ring the bell? We will have all this cleared away!" "Eleanor, dear!" said Mr. Hare, with much concern. "No, I'm too much disappointed to pretend to be anything else!" At this moment the carriage was heard coming to the front-door. Mr. Hare went gently away, looking reproachful. My aunt flew to the sideboard, wrapped up something in paper, hurried after him, enveloped him in a sudden embrace, thrusting a small packet into his pocket; and as the carriage rolled away, looked at me, shaking her head mournfully, a tear glistening in her eye. "Arthur, you have got a *bad-hearted* aunt! and I am wretched!" The parlour-maid approaches and murmurs something. "What did you say? Bless me, I must go at once!" Five minutes later she returned in the highest spirits. "I've got the very ducks' eggs I wanted. Mr. Hare is very fond of ducks' eggs. I can't bear them myself—I would as soon eat a *toad*!"

One evening came an august dinner-party, with



a little crowd of amiable people, whom my aunt had chivied hither and thither like chickens : as the last carriage drew off, my aunt, in black velvet, sank into a chair, and said, " I am simply dead with fatigue ! " " You do too much, dear," said Mr. Hare, looking admiringly at her. " Well, I can't pretend I don't enjoy it ! Give me a kiss, Arthur, and go to bed this *instant* ! I can't tell you how vain I am of having my tall Eton nephew to show off to all my friends."

One incredibly ludicrous incident remains with me. One day Mr. Hare took me up to town with him. I was to meet him at his club for luncheon and go to see a *matinée*. It was drizzling, and we started in a funny little phaeton which he sometimes used, with a hood in front and a little rumble behind. The deaf coachman and Mr. Hare, who was also somewhat deaf, were packed in in front, and I was inducted into the rumble, enveloped in rugs and coats as if to face a tornado. We drove smartly off to the station. About halfway I rose in the rumble to pull up a rug, and at the same moment the coachman touched up the pony with his whip, and the carriage gave a sharp forward jerk. I sate hastily and involuntarily down, overbalanced myself, and, all swathed in rugs as I was, fell out backwards into the road, quite undamaged. I gathered up my trappings and raised a shout, but neither of the occupants of the carriage heard me, and I was rapidly out-distanced. All I could do was to hurry on, like Tweedledee, in my swaddling-clothes ; and some quarter of an hour later, as I panted breathless into the street of Surbiton, I met the little carriage being driven hurriedly back, the coachman and Mr. Hare



both as white as ashes. They had gone to the station, and found the rumble empty, and had at once concluded, as no sound had been heard, that I must be lying stunned in the road. Dear Mr. Hare said, "Oh, what a fright you have given us! Why didn't you call out?" "I did—I'm so sorry!" was all I could find to say. "Well, get in, and we'll catch the next train." We did: at luncheon Mr. Hare made me drink a small glass of cherry-brandy, to ward off the effects of the shock; and the only further allusion to the incident was when we drove into the gate in the evening, and Mr. Hare said to me with a slightly shame-faced air, "Arthur, one thing—*don't tell Eleanor!*"

## v

Alas! a year or two later the stroke of sorrow fell on the happy household. Little Mary died quite suddenly in 1883 of some brain trouble. I went down to the funeral, and helped to carry the tiny coffin to the grave. I can see my aunt among the silent groups—many friends and relations came—moving about in black, her fine mouth compressed, her eyes full of tears, on the verge of collapse, but determined to manage everything, say the right word to everyone, see that everyone was well supplied with food, and keep the poor desolate father from giving way—and doing all with inexpressible fortitude and bravery.

But the spring of life was broken within her. She was seized by some internal malady, for which nothing could be done; she came to Lambeth, I remember, to tell my father and mother, full of courage and even cheerfulness, but with a look of doom and suffering



in her face ; and she died in 1890 as gallantly as she had lived, with loving messages to all those for whom she had found room in her large heart. She had tried to find consolation by taking in a motherless niece and nephew, the children of my Aunt Ada—who also died very suddenly—with their bereaved father, and making a home for them with infinite tenderness and care.

And then at last Mr. Hare could bear the house no longer, and, more frail and silent than ever, moved into London, where he too died in the following year. A tale of confused sorrow and loss, but with the ultimate background of hope that survives in the remembrance of all lives that have been lived in the sunshine of service and love.



## II

### A SIGHT OF RUSKIN

WHEN I was a boy at Eton there was an institution known as the Literary Society, which enjoyed what now seems to me to have been an astonishing degree of independence. It was entirely managed and officered by boys ; it possessed property in the shape of some three hundred chairs—how acquired, I do not know—light, unsubstantial, small cane-bottomed chairs, decidedly uncomfortable, which were stored in a room of the disused Brewery. The Society held meetings, at which no master was present except by express invitation. But the most singular part of the whole affair was that the Society, unassisted, ran all the public lectures that were given in the school, perhaps three in each half. The boy-President invited men of eminence to lecture—Gladstone, Matthew Arnold, Ruskin, Frederic Myers, to name but a few of many notable lecturers whom I heard there—billeted them on some hospitable master, asked the Provost or some dignitary to introduce them and propose a vote of thanks, printed, issued, and distributed the tickets, so that in the case of a popular and distinguished lecturer, the officers of the Society were besieged with requests for tickets from masters and masters' wives for several days beforehand. It was all inconvenient and topsy-turvy,





*W. & D. Downey.*

JOHN RUSKIN WITH DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.

Circa 1875.







but somehow effective and business-like ; the entire expenses were paid out of the subscriptions of the members of the Society—that is to say, by the boys themselves. How such a system had been allowed to grow up I do not know ; but there it was, and I venture to think that it had its value in training the boys to be equal to a certain degree of public responsibility.

In 1880, at the age of eighteen, I was elected President of the Society, and one evening in July I talked over the question of lecturers with two or three boy-friends, one of whom happened to be a nephew of Matthew Arnold. He was told off to write to his uncle and secure him, which he immediately did ; while I addressed letters, written in a style which I considered both dignified and engaging, to half a dozen eminent men, asking for lectures. Some of them accepted, some not ; and from the tone of their letters, it was clear to me that they supposed the request to have been made by one of the masters. But the reply which gave me the greatest pride and delight was one from Ruskin, cordially and almost eagerly accepting the invitation. He had lectured before at Eton, in 1873 on the Swallow, in 1874 on Botticelli, and knew that he was writing to a boy. He fixed Saturday, November 6, as his date. He had just been for a tour among the northern French cathedrals, and had spent a good deal of the autumn at Amiens. He was engaged in writing a book, afterwards known as *The Bible of Amiens*. This he told me, and said that as the subject was in his mind, he would lecture upon it. A considerable correspondence followed. He sent some plans, photographs, rough sketches, and notes, which he wished to be



placed in some public room, so that any boys who were interested in the subject might have access to them. This was accordingly arranged, and the papers were placed in the School Library. A few enthusiasts consulted them, but nothing was done, I regretfully confess, to bring them actively before the notice of the boys.

Then came the question as to where he would stay for the lecture. I consulted the Headmaster about this, and he instructed me to write to Ruskin to invite him to stay over the Sunday with himself. But about all this Ruskin was quite firm. He was very much obliged to the Headmaster for his courtesy, but he would be staying with friends, I think at Wraysbury, a village beyond Datchet, a few miles from Eton. He would drive over. Neither would he dine anywhere; he had been ill, he said, and was tired. But he would arrive in the course of the evening, and all he would ask was that he might have a quiet room to rest in, for an hour beforehand. He was not equal, he said, to meeting people either before or after the lecture; he would just deliver it and slip away. Again I consulted the Headmaster, who had in College an official room known as Chambers, a comfortable panelled place, in which masters met daily to transact business, and where he interviewed offenders. He said that this should be prepared for Ruskin, and that he would send him in a cup of coffee, and so the arrangements were completed.

I remember that as the day drew near I was fairly amazed by the interest that Ruskin's visit seemed to arouse. The lecture was to be in the old School Library, at the north end of the College New Buildings, in Weston's yard; a pleasant, book-lined room with



a narrow gallery running round it, and decorated, after the style of the forties, in a sort of heavy bastard Gothic, linen-pattern panelling, and a very baronial kind of open fireplace, with armorial bearings above, and eminently heraldic hippogriffs below, acting as fire-dogs—the whole made out of moulded plaster, painted a light buff; the room lighted by a great lacquered brass gas-chandelier. But somehow the effect contrived to be both stately and impressive.

Applications for tickets poured in; we crammed the floor and gallery with chairs, and even put cushions on the ledges of the statue of the Dying Gladiator, which occupied a shallow oriel at the end of the room; and then came a game of football and tea, and a leisurely gossip.

It is almost impossible, after this lapse of time, for me to recover how much or how little I knew about Ruskin and his work, and to what extent I knew who or what he was. There were one or two masters at Eton who used to quote his opinions with the sort of deference that might be paid to one, let us say, of the minor prophets, and he was admired and spoken of and read in my own home as an art-critic and an exponent of medieval painting and architecture; my father regarded him with reverence mixed with regret, as a great interpreter of beauty, who had rather perversely turned aside to dabble in political economy and social theories of a fantastic kind. And I had myself dipped and dived into a good many of Ruskin's works, skipping all the solemn enunciation of principles and moral exhortations, but delighting in the beauty of the more ornate periods, and in the rich irony and humour as well as the subtle personal charm of the more familiar and inti-



mate passages. And then, too, I had been to the National Gallery with my father, to be duly initiated into the magnificence of the Turner pictures, their inextricable richness, and the inner veracity transcending all outer actuality ; and I had been taught, too, to detect the pretentious and disgraceful falsity of Claude, " casting the shadow of himself on all he saw "—so that, taking all together, I thought dimly of Ruskin as a great and august writer, full of divine certainties and severities, an art-dictator in fact, while I was yet aware by hearsay of a strain of perversity and petulance in him, a touch of unjustified infallibility, claiming an authority in matters with which he was insufficiently acquainted. This, I expect, was the current opinion about Ruskin at this time, and I duly reflected it, as a receptive boy of no independence or originality might be expected to do.

Ruskin was at this time a man of sixty-one, and he had passed through many experiences and vicissitudes in the last twenty years. Until he was forty, his career had been one of uninterrupted and conspicuous success, and he was by 1860 regarded as the greatest living art-critic, a staunch moralist, and a man of high literary genius. Then he had made a series of sad discoveries about the world, had found that it was an unhappy place for many people, and that the vast majority of its inhabitants were so brutalised by poverty and drudgery that the very idea of art had no meaning for them ; and then it appeared to him that he had been living in a dream, and writing in a dream for a few cultured and diletante people ; and a great revulsion of feeling had passed over him ; he felt that he must do something



towards the solution of the hideous problem, and at all events try to explain to the world where its sickness lay. So he had written *Unto This Last*, had alienated many of his followers and admirers, and had found it impossible to obtain an even respectful hearing for his views. Then he had been made Slade Professor of Art at Oxford, and his old enthusiasms had partly revived. But these had been years of profound and increasing bitterness and discouragement. He had come to regard himself as a man with a prophetic message, but perceived, or thought he perceived, that though his adherents were ready to read and praise any amount of ornamental writing, the moment he began to instruct them in the principles of life they were either sorrowful or inattentive. He founded a Guild, which very few people joined; he addressed a series of letters to the Working Men of England, which everyone read except the working man. He had fallen deeply in love with a beautiful and accomplished girl, much younger than himself, but she had refused to marry him because of the unorthodoxy of his religious views and even at last to see him. He had passed through the bitterness of a grievous quarrel with one of his best friends and helpers, Miss Octavia Hill; she had spoken slightly of his practical and administrative gifts and his power of leadership, and he had regarded it as an act of treason. Lastly he had had a terrible brain illness in 1878, from which he never really recovered. And thus he was in the tragic position of a man who felt he had failed to accomplish any serious work in the world, while he despised such fame as his books had won him as a merely worthless decoration. Many close friends had failed him, finding him petulant,



authoritative, and fantastic. Yet he was conscious of having given his life, his time, his wealth, to noble ends, and claimed to have never written a line with his own enjoyment and credit in view. Probably only his intimate friends knew the intensity of the anguish in which he lived, for he had never lost his personal charm, or the fascination of his eager and vivid talk.

On the evening of the lecture, then, I sat and talked, all my preparations made, with a youthful insouciance about the whole affair. A small boy appeared at the door, with a message from the matron—could I speak to her for a moment? It was now about half-past six, and I wondered what she wanted to say to me. I found her in her comfortable little parlour on the ground-floor; she was sitting in an armchair, and on the hearthrug, holding a large portfolio, was one of the most singular figures I had ever seen. There were at that time some quaint survivals at Eton, senior masters the points of whose high collars, swathed in intricate cambric cravats, threatened to run into their eyes; but the figure before me seemed to have come from a previous century. As I remember, his tight-waisted dress-coat had a velvet collar, the sleeves were long, and the delicate hands that emerged were enveloped in long, somewhat crumpled cuffs; and he showed a soft and many-pleated shirt-front over a double-breasted waistcoat. I think he wore a long gold watchguard.

His hair was thick and grizzled and grew very full, especially over the forehead; he had large side-whiskers and bushy eyebrows; the face was extraordinarily lined, and the big mouth, with a full underlip, gave him a tenacious and, I thought, a



rather formidable air. He was standing in silence, and the matron was too much awed to speak. However, she called me by name, and said faintly, "Ben-son, this is Mr. Ruskin." Ruskin extended his delicate hand and shook mine very warmly and cordially. And as he did so, he gave me a delightful smile from his pale blue eyes, and set me at my ease at once.

I then conducted the great man through the corridors of College—it was after the hour of lock-up, so that we could not go the more direct way—and he was the object of much respectful curiosity from the groups of boys that we passed ; he smiled, nodded, glanced pleasantly at many of them ; and thus down the steep little breakneck stairs that led out into the cobbled schoolyard. I remember that he said something about its being pleasantly medieval ; and so we reached the Headmaster's Chambers. There he sat down rather wearily in the Headmaster's chair. He asked me a few questions about his sketches and photographs, and was not, I remember, over-pleased to hear that they had not been more publicly discussed. Coffee was brought in for him ; and then he began to talk about reading, and to ask what I read. I mentioned some Waverley Novels, and he brightened up at this. " Ah, you read Scott—there's nothing like that. Which have you read ? " As a matter of fact I had been brought up at home on Scott, and I had recently in a fit of enthusiasm read all of the Waverley Novels with which I had not previously been acquainted. I told him I had read them all. " What, every single one ? " I cannot remember the words he used, but he told me not to read them *all* again, but rather to have a few favourites



and to know them by heart, and he said something to the effect that though the later novels were written with a fine motive, that Sir Walter might stand up before the world as an honest man not burdened with debt, this did not unfortunately make them good books. And then he talked a little of the future, and asked me what I thought of doing in the world, all kindly and confidingly, in a way that won my regard, it was so modest and courteous; but there was a sense of strain and weariness in the background. Then he said that he must rest a little and be quiet, and that I might fetch him just before eight. He smiled and nodded, and then sate, leaning his brow upon his hand.

It appeared afterwards that he had forgotten, for the only time in his life, to bring his manuscript; and I think he must have spent some part of the quiet hour in writing from memory some of the exordium of the lecture. When I came back to fetch him he was more alert; and we went out together by the great front gate, and round to the right through Weston's Yard, to the entrance of the library vestibule.

There was a great and overflowing crowd to hear him, and he received a tremendous ovation. I sate close under the little shabby old deal desk covered with red baize, lighted by a pair of my own candlesticks. He was introduced; and then began in his high thin voice, very clearly and audibly, but with a formal and monotonous cadence and intonation, what I afterwards recognised in *The Bible of Amiens*, the beautiful and scornful description of the railway-station and the tall warehouses and the smoking chimneys, and the slender, lovely minaret of the cathedral rising behind all.



But then came a change ; as soon as he finished his preamble, he began speaking in a quite different and far more arresting voice, in an animated, conversational manner—he explained, gesticulated, held up diagrams, asked questions, drew ironical conclusions, pointed morals with an almost rueful earnestness. Occasionally, for he must have had some bits of manuscript with him, he went back to the reading voice ; and I decided that it was very impressive, though not natural ; it had something ghostly, remote, magical, about it, and gave one a curious shiver, almost. And even more impressive were the quick glances, half-friendly, half-mournful, of the pale eyes under the shaggy brows.

There is little of it that I remember ; there was much that I did not understand, for the whole was lacking in coherence and logical connection ; but it was an inspiring, appealing, intensely moving performance. I felt that he was a great man, with great and beautiful beliefs passionately held, yet both oppressed and obviously unhappy. He was contending with something, perhaps a vulture gnawing at his heart, like Prometheus. There was never a sign of placid or easy mastery ; no appearance of enjoyment, even of interest : it was a duty he had to perform, a service he might do ; and at the end he looked old and weary. Then he was thanked and cheered to the echo. He listened patiently enough, but with no satisfaction. He said a few grateful and friendly words, shook hands with the Headmaster. Then he picked up his portfolio, made a sign to me, and we walked out through the cheering boys.

Outside there was a little brougham waiting. He



put his portfolio in, shook hands very warmly and kindly, got in quickly, and was driven off into the night.

He was even then, I now know, on the brink of another brain attack; and the whole affair must have been a very great strain to him. I wish I could have met him in his lighter and gayer days, and in one of his enchanting moods; but to have seen him, as I did, bearing his burden so patiently and courteously, not sparing himself, and giving the best of himself, eagerly and open-handedly, has helped me to interpret the mood of deep sadness underlying the triumphant irony, the lavish scorn, the furious denunciation, which dissemble the sorrow and obliterate the endurance, so that these hardly win the compassion that they deserve.









OTTIWELL CHARLES WATERFIELD.

Circa 1892.



### III

#### O. C. WATERFIELD

##### I

CERTAINLY no one in the world in my boyish days, with the sole exception of my father, ever made so strong an impression on my mind, and indeed on the deeper inner self behind the mind, as the Headmaster of my private school, O. C. Waterfield. I daresay that is not a unique experience. Probably most sensitive and perceptive boys, when first translated from home amenities and amiable domestic discipline, regard with dejection and dismay the bareness and publicity of the barrack life of school, and look upon the Headmaster, the irresponsible lord of the little domain, who is judge and executioner alike, with awe and terror; but apart from this, I believe that Waterfield was a really remarkable man, with a fine distinction of quality about him; and I shall try to draw a little picture of the scene and life of Temple Grove, as it was called, as a background to the figure of Waterfield, who indeed permeated and controlled the whole place in a very extraordinary manner, without effort or intervention, in an inflexible and inevitable way of which only natural rulers have the secret.



## II

Ottiwell Charles Waterfield was an old friend of my parents. His father lived, I think, at Rugby ; and I remember the photograph, in an old family album, of a severe and somewhat formidable old gentleman, with a thick thatch of white hair, at which we used to gaze, after we became Waterfield's pupils, with a sort of terror, as being the likeness of the undoubted progenitor of our lord and master, and trace the signs of incipient wrath in his face.

O. C. Waterfield was a scholar of Eton, and more or less a contemporary of my father's at Cambridge. At Rugby he had a reputation for social brilliancy, and I seem to remember my mother speaking of him as being, in her childish days, the evoker of many maidenly fancies and visions. He became a Fellow of King's and went back as a master to Eton in the fifties ; but did not remain there very long. I should imagine that he was a masterful young man, who liked a position of supreme authority ; he purchased the old-established school of Temple Grove, near Mortlake, and from the very first was extremely successful.

## III

My elder brother had gone to Temple Grove in 1870, and I gathered from him that Waterfield was the one central and all-important *fact* of the place, pervading and dominating visibly and invisibly the school and all its concerns with an unaccountable sense of supremacy.

In 1872 I was conducted there with my brother by my father and mother. I was mildly sorry to leave home, but neither flustered nor interested—I



had no views on the subject of school—and the feeling produced in me by my father's and mother's words and behaviour during the last day or two of the childish life, which was now coming to an end, was a curious one. There was something momentous in the air, I dimly discerned ; and there was a sense too of emotion, regretful and pathetic, as though I were passing out of a sheltered nest into something adventurous and even perilous, which might blur the old innocence and diminish the familiar loyalties. I did not analyse it thus, of course, but I was aware that there was some emotional pulse agitating the atmosphere, and vaguely disquieting. I was a very harmless, dreamy creature, easily influenced, easily discouraged ; and I do not doubt that there was a touch of tragedy in my parents' minds at the slow absorption of the family circle into the world.

We arrived ; my parents went off to luncheon with the Waterfields : my brother took me up to my dormitory to dispose my goods in my little cubicle, one of ten, in a tall, spacious, solid old bedroom ; and then he took me down to dinner. The first experience was delightful. I was accepted by my brother's friends, found a companion or two whom I knew on my own account, and wandered about with a party of pleasant boys. It was not till the afternoon, when my father and mother went off with many messages and embraces and much waving of hands, that I had any suspicion that all was not serene ; but as I returned from the station with my brother, he seemed in low spirits, and I asked him what was the matter. He said in a tragic voice, "Twelve weeks at this beastly place !"—and the air darkened about me.



## IV

Temple Grove has now entirely disappeared, and has been laid out in little streets of villas. It was at East Sheen, between Mortlake and Richmond Park. It was a great mansion, which turned its back upon the road, surrounded by high walls. Its name came from its having been the villa of Sir William Temple, and Swift, I suppose, had lived there. It was an ample, solid, substantial building, covered with old grey cement; and at one end it had been augmented by the addition of large wings for school purposes. The old rooms were high and well-proportioned. The state entrance was dignified, but the boys' approach was encumbered by mean and bare brick buildings.

It was surrounded by large and beautiful grounds, and there were signs everywhere of stately and leisurely occupation. I remember, for instance, a curious stone summer-house, of rough rustic work, with a pediment like a Greek temple, of which the front had been boarded up, which ruefully surveyed the arid gravelled playground. In the grounds was a big artificial mound covered with trees, with a gazebo at the top. There had been a lake, which had been drained and turfed, but the sluice which had fed it still projected from a slope covered with elder bushes. There were big elms all about, and all around stood other fine suburban mansions in walled grounds. Indeed, my idea of East Sheen is a place of high and secret walls, with great trees and solid façades discerned within.

In the grounds at one place was a partly ruinous paling through which it was possible to peep. There was a dense shrubbery here, and some little mounds



inside, with headstones, much overgrown with periwinkles, the graves no doubt of dogs, but which in my own mind I believed to be the graves of children—perhaps of boys who had died at the school, and which I regarded with a mournful pleasure. It never occurred to me to think that a boy dying in the school could not be interred in a neighbouring shrubbery without public ceremony !

Altogether the demesne was both stately and romantic. If the place had been one's home, one would have regarded it all with great delight and affection. We were allowed under certain conditions the run of these grounds, and the hours spent there were some of the few really happy ones that I recollect at Temple Grove.

The later additions to the house, made by previous occupants, were much less dignified. There was a low, food-scented dining-room, approached through a long disused lavatory, with small basins let into slate slabs, belonging to a former régime, for the place had been a school for many years.

Then there was a big bare schoolroom, with much-guarded fires, with five desks for masters surrounded by rows of deeply hacked and inscribed lockers. But there was something pleasantly human about all that array of old rudely-carved names and initials. Upstairs there were airy cubicled dormitories, which we were not allowed to visit in the daytime.

The one delightful refuge was a big but cosy, carpeted and curtained room, many-windowed, with a verandah outside, called the Library, communicating with Waterfield's study, and therefore always orderly and quiet. Here there was a huge bookcase of readable books, and many comfortable chairs and sofas.



## V

The life of the place was simple and Spartan. The food was wholesome and good, but hardly adequate, according to modern ideas. Bread and butter for breakfast with tea or coffee; mid-day dinner at 1.30, meat and pudding with beer, or even porter. Tea with bread and butter at 6.0, and a supper of a very simple kind at 8.30. Many articles of diet were foolishly and strictly tabooed by the boys, and though the food was excellent and well-served, the legends current about it and deeply rooted in tradition were portentous. It was the rule to consume one's meals with an air of intense and reluctant disgust, as though one's only aim was just to sustain life; and the fashion was to leave as much food untasted as one could. There were amazing fables told and retold, of which I never for a moment doubted the truth, though the preparation of such dishes as we denounced would have entailed incredible trouble and earnest diligence. It was said that discarded gloves were chopped up and introduced into mince-meat pies—pies which I secretly thought delicious. The potatoes were known to be the roots of flowering plants, and the butler had been observed to water the beer with his own hands. As a matter of fact, the only possible complaint was that the diet was rather monotonous. I had a healthy appetite, but submitted of course to the traditions with much discomfort.

The place was run on the old-fashioned classical lines. There were a hundred and twenty boys and a dozen masters, pleasant and kindly men, and most efficient. We did Greek, Latin, Divinity, and Mathematics. French and German were taught by little-



regarded foreigners ; and there was a writing-master, a good-humoured man, with large side-whiskers, of incredible and yet lovable absurdity, for whom we wrote "specimens." I shall never forget how in one of the sudden silences that occur without apparent cause in large gatherings, the rich voice of Mr. Abbot, presiding at one of the tables, was heard all over the room saying, "My uncle is a man of large property in the North," followed by a burst of laughter.

A little History and Geography was taught, but the classics were the basis of everything, and the school had a high reputation for winning scholarships at most of the public schools.

I was placed fairly high, and never found the least difficulty in any of the work, being generally at the top of the class ; in mathematics I was for a long time at the head of the school.

I remember being early introduced to Homer, and can recollect the disgustful curiosity with which I surveyed an ugly little text of the *Odyssey*, crammed from end to end with hideous unknown symbols, never dreaming what a beautiful story lay hid under the cipher. I never took the smallest interest or pleasure in the work itself. Fear of punishment and the convenience of being at the top of the class—for the top boy in each class had certain very desirable privileges, such as free rambles on Sundays and permitted visits to Richmond on half-holidays—were my only incentives. I did not want to beat the other boys, and I had no ambition to excel.

There were no strictly organised athletics, though cricket, football, and fives were played, and there was a good gymnasium. I was a poor and diffi-



dent performer in games, and ended by playing nothing but a little stump-cricket. I used to go out for walks in Richmond Park, with a dozen boys, accompanied by a bored but kindly usher. I mooned about for hours in the grounds alone ; but the permitted visits to Richmond were a great delight, because food became one's chief pre-occupation. One used to hurry through the market-gardens, go to certain shops, execute commissions, make up one's pack of provisions, and return in haste to munch at leisure. I remember one adventurous boy who went unauthorised to Richmond, but took the precaution of going "disguised"—that is to say, he turned his cap inside-out and pulled up his coat-collar. He returned in high glee : it had all proved entirely successful ; he had met two masters, who had asked him why he was got up like a guy ; and this, he said, had diverted their minds from the real danger.

There was one curious and most nonsensical regulation. In the summer, from some fad of the medical officer, we were not allowed water except at meals, and it was actually cut off from all the lavatory taps, so that we could not obtain it. It was possible, however, by getting a friend to blow down one of the brass lavatory taps, to get a little of the water lurking in the pipes to trickle out. First the breath came out of the tap, then a few drops used to rustle out, which were caught in a tin can and drunk. Late in the afternoon a little water was served out at a hatch by the butler, and the excitement of the crowd of boys was painful to witness. On one hot July afternoon we had a history lecture from a lame, very pompous, and lengthy gentleman, but



the whole attention of the audience was concentrated on a tumbler of water placed on his desk, in case he was troubled with huskiness ; and the moment he rose from his seat at the end, there was a rush to seize the glass. But worse still !—we found a covered well in one of the fields, closed by a stone disc. We used to let down a blue fluted lotion-bottle into the darkness by a string. The water came up full of black living creatures, leeches and beetles. The fluid was carefully strained, the beetles cast away, and the rest eagerly drunk ; but no one ever suffered any disastrous results to my knowledge, while the agonies of thirst on really hot days were almost insupportable.

## VI

On the whole, I was unhappy at Temple Grove, for no ostensible cause. It was not that I was ever bullied, or even made fun of in any way. The masters were both friendly and vigilant, the matron was kindly, and if anything over-anxious, the staff of servants were extremely efficient ; and Waterfield in the background was not to be trifled with. One thing in particular I may gratefully relate, that I never heard a single word of improper or indecent talk, nor saw an indecent action of any kind, and that I left the school after two years as entirely innocent and ignorant of the very existence of moral evil as I had entered it. Waterfield handled the whole matter sensibly, and never, as some conscientious schoolmasters do, set the boys' minds on the alert by veiled and mysterious warnings. Once or twice I saw signs and hints of some mystery, but not enough even to make me inquisitive, and it is a wonderful testimony to the tone of the place



and to Waterfield's influence, that among so many boys, and some of them rough enough, the thing was so completely annihilated.

But I used to pine in secret for home and leisure and comfortable rooms and domestic affections, and hated the bleak dormitory, the bare schoolrooms, the crowded life, the hum of the hive. I really hardly made any friends, and wholly guarded my heart. When my father once suggested that we might wish to have some boys to stay with us in the holidays, I regarded the suggestion with incredulous horror. To admit boys from school to the sanctities of home, where they would see that one had sisters, hear one called by one's Christian name, carry back stories of our family ways, was a thought of deep tragedy, like casting what was holy to dogs. My one idea was to seclude myself utterly and entirely from relations with other boys; one was mildly friendly, talked school gossip, had small jokes, played little games. But the whole preoccupation was not to give oneself away, and to adopt cautiously and strictly all the conventions of the place. Yet there were plenty of pleasant and companionable boys there. I remember Lord Grey of Fallodon, a sturdy, cheerful creature—I can see the very cut and pattern of his clothes. The present Provost of Eton, afterwards to become one of my best friends, was there, and I remember his showing me an immense list of Roman saints, with mysterious symbols appended. There was a big, handsome, curly-haired boy called Have-lock, with a breezy manner, who seemed to me a hero of romance; a little, attractive, petulant child, very decisive and peremptory in manner, whose very name I cannot recover, and who is now, I believe,



an Admiral; Hobday, afterwards a General in the Indian Army, the most astonishing draughtsman, whose drawings, thrown off in scores, were greatly treasured; Lord Dungarvan, a brisk, laughter-loving elf, with the manner of a spoilt child; Palmer, now Lord Selborne, robust and rather peremptory—they pass before the memory like smiling ghosts. Once, I remember, a gentle-looking creature, Raikes-Currie by name, made shy overtures of friendship to me in the course of a walk, and even showed me a poem beginning “In the dark halls of Fotheringay,” which seemed to me a work of amazing genius; but unfortunately I was frightened of the whirlpool, though naturally cheerful enough, let all human contact stream past disregarded, and warded it off, to my loss and hurt.

I was, however, it may be said, rather a delicate boy then, had bad sore throats and other childish ailments. If one was ill, one was either sent up to a comfortable room at the top of the house, with a fire and a shelf of books, which was at all events a relief from daily routine, or if one was really ailing, one was sent down to a little old panelled house with a walled garden, shaded with ilex trees, in Mortlake. It was presided over by a sturdy, motherly woman called Louisa, who had once been a maid in our own household, who petted and made much of me, let me help her in the kitchen, and in whose presence alone I was conscious of some irrational human affection. The happiest days I spent at Temple Grove were in that little house, watching a grocer opposite keep shop and set out his window, reading story-books, wandering about the little garden. One term I was wholly absent through illness, so that I



only spent some five terms there in all. Yet what a space of life it seems to fill, and with what amazing distinctness do I recollect every smallest detail of the place !

The masters were a thoroughly good set of men. Rawlings, a burly *bonhomme*, who took the first class, was liked and revered mainly for the reason that in speaking to Waterfield he called him " Waterfield," and showed him no particular respect. He was an excellent scholar, and a man who might have made a place for himself in the world ; I daresay he was unhappy and felt a failure ; but one never thought of one's elders in those days as anything but quite complacent and self-satisfied. Geoghegan—we called him Gairgan or Gege—was a hard-featured, bearded, one-armed man, with a quick temper and incisive of speech, but really fond of boys and much beloved by them. The second-in-command, who afterwards succeeded Waterfield, was Edgar, a courteous and kindly clergyman, who had been in the army, and bore the scar of a sabre-cut on his neck—a just and capable man, much respected.

But the rest were entirely dominated by Waterfield, simple subalterns, but thoroughly kindly men, neither pompous nor tyrannical. I remember a sad, pale, red-haired young clergyman, sitting wearily in his desk reading a book, after evening school was over, when the boys were larking about all over the school-room. I drew near, asked him some question, and seeing that the book was a treatise on the Creed, ventured to enquire why he was reading it. He said meekly that he was shortly to be examined in it—I suppose for Holy Orders—and I daresay he was anxious about the results. But the idea that an elderly



clergyman, as I thought him, could be *examined* in anything, unless he chose to be, opened such a vista of strange possibilities before me that I did not feel equal to continuing the talk.

Mr. Abbot, whom I have already mentioned, was really the joy of the place ; he had almost menial duties to perform, such as serving out ink and paper, but he threw into the whole process such mystery and dignity, his threats of punishment were so far-reaching, the status of his family and connections was so exalted, by his own account, that we never tired of discussing him. Every term we had to write the much-regarded “specimens” ; and even now I can see the air with which Mr. Abbot used to consent, after infinite persuasion, to an exhibition of his own supreme skill—his head on one side, his tongue slightly protruded, flourishing his hand in vague circles over the paper, till the moment came, and the unerring pen descended, producing, after swift skirmishing, a wonderful initial letter, perhaps rather in the commercial style ! As the time drew near for the “specimens,” he used to send boys out to fetch him histories or divinity text-books, that he might select a passage of a high ornamental character, luscious enough for the embalming process. Book after book used to be scrutinised and rejected. “I can’t decide to-night,” he would say with infinite solemnity. “It wants to be a very tasty piece, does a specimen ! ”

Mr. Abbot was visibly and unashamedly terrified of Waterfield, and would do much to avoid an official interview ; even his own social eminence did not avail him then. He was entirely incapable of preserving any semblance of discipline in his classes ;



and he was fond of rising from his place, seizing an offender, and saying, "Now, I am going to take you straight to Mr. Waterfield for a good caning!" The culprit would protest and entreat. Mr. Abbot would fling the door open, and march the boy along the passage, the sound of the protests, with Mr. Abbot's rich voice interjecting, "No, you've gone too far this time," growing fainter in the corridor, till, at a safe distance from the study door, Mr. Abbot would relent, and say that he did not wish to be too hard on any boy, but that the culprit must faithfully promise to behave himself in the future. They would then return amicably together, and Mr. Abbot would proclaim his own longsuffering magnanimity to the class—"I thought I might give him one more chance."

But on one luckless evening, just as Mr. Abbot was deciding to relent, the study door opened, and Waterfield marched out. "Mr. Abbot, what's the meaning of this?" Mr. Abbot's consternation was pitiable. The very last thing in the world that he desired was to encounter the Headmaster. He murmured something about having gone to consult the matron; and on returning to his class announced that he had seen Mr. Waterfield, but had successfully interceded for the offender. "But it mustn't happen again!" he said, and indeed he had already made up his mind that it should not.

## VII

Waterfield himself was a tall, impressive-looking man, with a vague resemblance to the portraits of Charles Dickens, wearing his curly hair rather long, and with a short grizzled beard. He was



always dressed like a great gentleman, sometimes in a frock-coat, sometimes in loose, well-fitting grey. When he was arrayed in a full silk gown he was almost too majestic for words. A faint scent of Havana cigars hung about him. He walked with a slight limp, which gave him a swaying motion, and he had eyes of great brilliance which opened wide, if he was surprised or vexed, and struck terror into our souls. I have never in my life been so afraid of a human being as I was of him. I thought of him as wholly indifferent to us boys—that we were just more or less inconvenient adjuncts to his surpassing greatness. He seemed to live in a far-off atmosphere of fashion and high culture. As a matter of fact, he observed us very closely, and his reports were models of insight and penetration. He was a really great teacher, extremely clear and forcible, and it was from him that I first learnt that it was possible to be intellectually interested. He did not teach us regularly, but he used to send for a class to his study, or take us in Latin composition; the first-class schoolroom was in a separate building, some way from the house, and had a small study adjoining it, a sort of garden smoking-room. Waterfield used suddenly to open the door from this into the classroom, and ask Rawlings to send him in a set of boys. He had a curious habit, as he taught us, of breaking off in the middle of a sentence, or even in the middle of a word, and we believed that we were meant to supply the missing word or syllable if we could. He had a rich, distinct voice, with a pleasant laugh, and, if he chose, could make a lesson extraordinarily stimulating. I shall never forget his reading us some of Barnes's Dorsetshire poems to illustrate



the difference of Doric and Ionic Greek. He had a singular, almost hysterical trick whenever he read poetry aloud; his voice used to falter, a large tear brimmed his eyes, and fell on his waistcoat. I did not think of this as in any way emotional—it was just a habit he unquestionably chose to adopt.

But he was too severe, and punished a good deal, believed in caning and flogging—I still shudder at the sound of his bunch of keys, when he unlocked a drawer in his writing-table and pulled out a cane. It was a thoroughly topsy-turvy affair, to beat a terrified boy for mistakes, not carelessly so much as stupidly made, and then to expect him to imbibe information which after all was utterly trivial. Waterfield really had not the slightest need, in most cases, to punish boys at all, for his words spoken in anger bit deep, and he was regarded with almost fanatical respect—everything he did seemed a condescension.

I used to think in church how surprisingly humble it was of him to open a hymn-book or to pray, when he was at once so blameless and all-powerful. It never occurred to me that he had anything either to regret or desire.

I am sure, however, that Waterfield was in no sense of the word a cruel or heartless man. There were two or more of his own boys in the school, handsome, fresh-faced, curly-haired boys. I remember thinking, in some fanciful reverie, that dreadful as it was to be exposed to the baleful glare of the luminary as it sailed remorselessly by, to live on close and familiar terms with him, in daily proximity, would be unendurable and fatal. But his own sons not only had no terror of him, they found him good-natured and



easy-going enough. Mrs. Waterfield was herself a handsome and impulsive woman. He was, we used to think, somewhat impatient of her effusive interventions, and used to speak ironically and even abruptly to her; but it never for a moment ruffled her good-natured and kindly composure. I believe indeed, reflecting maturely upon the situation, that they had an excellent understanding and a real camaraderie, and that she accepted his rather trenchant criticisms as "only his way," and neither resented them nor fretted over them.

We adored Mrs. Waterfield, principally because it was recorded in the school tradition that she had done a noble deed. A boy had been caught at dinner by Waterfield mixing gravy, beer, salt, and mustard in a glass, and had been told to bring the potion up to the high table. "Now drink it up, sir!" While he stood helpless and irresolute, Mrs. Waterfield caught the tumbler from his hand, drank it, put her handkerchief to her lips, and hurried from the room.

But her good-nature was endless. My brother and I had whooping-cough at the school, and when we were convalescent, we were ordered—it was some eccentric fad of the medical officer's—to go to a neighbouring gas-works, and to spend an hour in being fumigated, by the simple process of pacing about in a high-walled yard into which some refuse from the retorts had been cast. Mrs. Waterfield came to our rescue, gave us an excellent luncheon in the private dining-room, drove us over to the works, paced about with us on the filthy burning offal, where we coughed and spluttered, and told us amusing anecdotes till the process was completed,



though I imagine that her own always admirable toilet must have been so infected by the stench of the refuse that it could never have been worn again.

But Waterfield's own much more firm theory of discipline must have been, I make little doubt, a mere tradition instinctively imbibed and perpetuated. As an Etonian of the forties, soon after the departure of Dr. Keate, though Hawtrey, Keate's successor, had been a teacher of real inspiration almost amounting to genius, such rough-and-ready obedience as there might be was maintained by ceaseless flagellation, while the younger boys were, to use an ugly old phrase, remorselessly licked into shape by the upper boys. I do not imagine that a man like Waterfield—who had certainly absorbed much of the real culture of Hawtrey—ever got so far as thinking that discipline could be maintained in a big school, or a brisk and business-like attention to work secured, except by personal chastisement. No other master was allowed to cane, and moreover I do not remember that there was much use of impositions, the heart-breaking and soul-deadening exaction of lines, selected, I suppose, for punishment as being the most complete and consummate violation of all the natural and healthy instincts of boyhood. Indeed, if Waterfield had reserved his chastisements for serious moral offences instead of mere intellectual peccadilloes, I should feel that the place had been run on truly enlightened lines; for we had really a high degree of freedom. The throwing open of the grounds to the boys, the permitted visits of virtuous boys to Richmond without the attendance of a master, the free rambles in Richmond Park on Sundays, all constituted an amount of independence conceded



to the boys which must have been most unusual in any private school.

And when Waterfield was in a thoroughly good humour, in teaching-hours, he showed a degree of patience and sympathy which were remarkable. I remember some mathematical lesson in geometry, given to a class of which I was a member, when a jolly boy of the sturdy, puzzle-headed Saxon type, with a great shock head of curly hair, proved entirely impenetrable to the simplest geometrical considerations. Waterfield made a rapid demonstration with three half-crowns to prove the doctrine of equalities ; and I can see now the boy, under the impression that it was a conjuring-trick of some kind, scrutinising the three half-crowns, one by one, with anxious nicety, and at last handing one of them to Waterfield, saying, " I think this is rather smaller than the other two, sir." Waterfield burst out laughing, rumbled the curly head, and said, " Ah, you don't understand the use of symbols !—What's a symbol, Benson ? " and there followed an ingenious little Platonic dialogue which I cannot reproduce now. One could hardly believe him to be the same man who would say to a dull boy, palpitating with terror, and returning, in the extremity of despair, the same lumpish answer, time after time, to Waterfield's brisk queries, " Don't bully me, sir—I'm not going to sit here half the morning to be bullied by you like this ! "

Again I remember my parents coming to stay a night at Temple Grove, and how my brother and myself were bidden to come in to dinner at a round table in the corner of the library—and how an animated argument about thirteenth-century French stained glass arose between my father and Water-



field, in which Waterfield seemed to possess fully as intimate an appreciation of French cathedrals as my father himself.

And then the scene shifts again; I was taken by Waterfield himself, with three other boys, to try for an Eton scholarship. He was in his liveliest mood, bought us books and papers at the station, made jokes, propounded unanswerable dilemmas. We stayed at the Christopher Inn. Our first paper was at seven o'clock in the morning. Waterfield came to see that we were getting up in good time, comforted us with coffee and rolls, walked up to the school with us, and when we returned after the paper, had a great substantial breakfast ready for us. But then he spoiled the whole affair by asking us what we had written; and I remember his casting down a fork on the table with a dramatic gesture of disgust at something I had put down. It only made us nervous and anxious, between the devil and the deep sea.

Two or three times I remember his assembling the school, and saying a few words of admonition and reproof about some unpleasant incident that had occurred—a case of bullying, for instance. He did this admirably, with great emotion and even with tears. His splendid presence, his clear, penetrating voice, his admirable little pauses and gestures, gave me a deep thrill. He used no threats; he expressed his astonishment and disgust at the occurrence, and added that he expected every boy to do his best to prevent the repetition of such a thing. “Mind, I mean every boy, the smallest and weakest as well as the biggest and strongest. We are all at one in hating this kind of thing, and in preventing it



as far as we can ; and if we all hate it, it *is* prevented."

At the moment, under the thrill of his persuasive presence, I do not think there was a single boy in the school who would not have done his best to intervene. The result was that when Waterfield retired, the bigger boys, with a silent kind of anger, made us all form in two lines down the schoolroom, and then made the gloomy, ugly lout who had been the tormentor, run the gauntlet. He was handsomely kicked and cuffed, and came out a truly pitiable object.

Later in the day some of the upper boys were summoned to the study. Waterfield in a mood, half-severe, half-jubilant, appeared. He looked round and said, "I hear you have given T—— a school licking. I think he deserved it ; but I won't have that kind of thing done again. I will only say this. I had intended to expel him ; but as you have taken the matter into your hands and punished him, I shall not expel him, and I shall not punish him any more ; but mind, he has had his punishment, and it is over, and he is not to be molested or teased about it or reminded of it in any way. He is going to do better, and I count upon you all to help him along. I trust you to do this, and I shall be very proud of the school if this is carried out."

I have always thought that an admirable handling of a difficult situation ; and it was entirely successful. The offender was received as if nothing had happened, and though he did not become popular, the affair was at an end. Waterfield had hit exactly the right note.



## VIII

Altogether, I feel that Waterfield was really a great educator. He understood the art of governing. The comparative rarity of his appearances invested him with a mysterious awe. He left most of the details of the place to be carried out by his subordinates. He selected them well, both his masters and his servants; he trusted them and he was faithfully served. What was lacking was just the further touch of imagination, which alone could have made him able to revise the old tradition of hardy and severe barrack-discipline. If he had seen a little more of the boys, and expanded more into his delightful talk; if he could have kept more in control the natural irritability of a highly-strung imperious man; if he could have introduced a little more amenity into the life of the place, without sacrificing its simplicity and liberty, it would have been at the head of all private schools.

Yet his own distinction and aloofness, and the sense of his being a man who somehow or other belonged to the bigger world, the exquisiteness of his own personal appointments, the aristocratic flavour of his demeanour and his gracious ease, all had a very real effect upon the school. There seemed nothing petty or professional about him. He was a man of the world, and yet neither cynical nor contemptuous; and perhaps the only defect was that he did not sufficiently trust the force of his character or the generosity of his impulses.

But in spite of the fact that Temple Grove was a wholesome, well-managed, kindly place, with a good tone, and singularly free from the petty faults and



cramping influences of the majority of the then existing private schools, I regarded it from first to last with aversion, and lived in an atmosphere of suspicion and dismay. I used to awake early on summer mornings, and hear the peacocks scream in a neighbouring pleasaunce ; I used to count the days before the holidays, kindle with joy at the thought of the pleasant weeks ahead, envy every member of the happy home-circle ; and then drearily reflect over the tiresome formal day before me, with its dull work, its frozen intercourse, its unappetising meals. I had a mild liking for a few of the boys, and one or two masters, but no romantic or idealising friendships, or even cordial camaraderies. I seemed to myself like a creature that had lost its way in the wilderness ; my schoolfellows seemed to me strong, indifferent, untrustworthy, the masters remote and uninteresting ; no eye seemed bent on me with any personal interest, no voice kindled with any friendly cadence ; the only thing to do was to preserve the peace, to trust that people would be kind, to read as much as one could, in order to forget one's surroundings, to hope that one would not meet Waterfield.

It was a morbid affair, no doubt ; I was inquisitive, capable, fond of imaginative things, but except for an occasional lesson from Waterfield, I never had any interest in such matters fed or stimulated—I was soundly enough taught, and did not get the least harm from the place. I learned to live a more or less conventional life, but learned no courage or ease of behaviour or geniality. I think I was very teachable, and should have responded eagerly to the influence of anyone who could have shown that he was personally interested in me. But I cannot remember



that any piece of work that I ever did was praised ; and no touch of human emotion was ever exhibited to me by any person in the place, except by the beloved Louisa. I do not mean that I hoped or pined for this, but it would have made an immense difference, coming as I did from a home atmosphere of great affection and peacefulness.

Yet it was a kindly, sensible, straightforward, business-like British business, and I was a rather listless, timid, grubby boy, not so much honestly humble as with an undue and disabling sense of morbid inferiority ; and so it was with a sense of delicious escape that I left Temple Grove. I had not any sentiment except that of unfeigned satisfaction. I never wanted to see the place, or the masters, or the boys again. I wanted to cast it all behind me, and forget it as soon as I could ; and the last sight of the high-walled, sinister house, as we drove away, gave me a thrill of intense pleasure, as though one had left the land of bondage. On the way down to the station, we stopped for a moment at the little sanatorium, I flew in at the ivy-fringed doorway, through the ilex-shadowed garden, and was clasped for a moment tearfully to Louisa's ample bosom. She had some little gift prepared for me—" my own dear boy ! " she said in her deep, resonant tones. That gave me one little touch of regret—but, alas ! it all lay under the shadow, and at least the world might have some richer experience to offer ; and so I drifted exultantly away.

Five years later, Waterfield left. He had made a comfortable fortune, and he settled down as a country gentleman near Canterbury ; but he afterwards engaged in considerable financial enterprises,



and became a director of the Ottoman Bank. I occasionally saw him for a moment to speak to at Eton, but always with a touch of the old awe ; until nearly twenty years later, when I was a house-master at Eton, he came to see me about a boy whom he wished to enter at Eton, and spent some time with me. He was more distinguished-looking than ever, I thought, with snowy hair and beard. But his talk had the same charm, and he had the same habit of breaking off in the middle of a sentence ; and I found myself mechanically supplying the missing word ! He remembered, I found, with extraordinary exactness, some of the small incidents of my boyhood. I could not offer him a vacancy, but gave him what advice I could ; yet so strong was the old habit of deference, that I felt my refusal to be almost an act of impiety, while his friendly handshake and his thanks for my advice seemed an instance of his admirable condescension.

He died very strangely not long after. He had come down to Windsor on business, and was going away by train when he saw an old soldier on the platform, entered into talk with him about his campaigns, and sitting on one of the station benches, offered him a cigar. A moment later he leaned back, and died almost instantaneously from a sudden heart attack. His body was removed to the mortuary ; and as he had told his family that he would be away for a few days on business, no anxiety was felt about him. But he had nothing on him that could bring about identification ; and his body actually lay unidentified at the hospital mortuary for a day or two, till the mention by a police inspector of the initials on his cigar-case caused him to be recognised.



It is at all events certain that Waterfield was a man of great abilities and administrative capacity, with a very dominant character and equally strong sensibilities. He had a real instinct for leadership, and strong educational interests ; he was a very fine judge of character ; and if he had had the chance, he might have made a really great headmaster ; but in those days a layman, however capable and intelligent, stood very little chance of a public-school headmastership. He had not a profound mind, but a widely cultivated one ; and with just a little more imagination and sympathy, and with a little less susceptibility to personal charm, he might have been in the very front rank of educators. As it was he did a fine piece of work ; he directed for many years a large and important private school, on healthy, wholesome-minded, peaceable, and orderly lines. He was vigilant and effective ; and very few boys indeed could ever have attributed any moral deterioration to his negligence or indifference. He served his generation well.

## IX

Some years ago I visited Temple Grove. It had long been given up as a school ; the house was destroyed, and little streets of small villas ran down across the cricket-field and the elm-fringed lawn. Yet I recognised many of the old landmarks. There was the old first-class schoolroom with Waterfield's summer study, there was the gazebo on the mound ; there, in a cutting made for a new road, were the familiar dogs' graves ! It gave me a faint emotion, though it brought back few happy memories—the emotion rather of an opportunity, frankly and generously offered me, of mixing on simple and



friendly lines with a large and healthy-minded society on the threshold of life—an opportunity which, out of timidity and childish frailty, I had missed and neglected. Yet I do not know how it could have been otherwise! The mind and heart follow their own instincts, and produce fruit and flower at certain seasons, by some hidden law of growth and life; and perhaps the only good thing which the perception of old mistakes can teach one is to be afraid of nothing except of being afraid.



## IV

### LADY PONSONBY

#### I

WHEN I was an Eton boy, and used to wander in and out among the quaint courts and cloisters and the breezy, wide-viewed terraces of Windsor Castle, there was a certain place that had a peculiar attraction, namely, the steep glacis that led up to the bulky, oblate mass of the great Round Tower. If I can trust my memory, it was, when I first knew it, a wild and deserted place, with its tussocky grass, bushes, and orchard-trees, rather a contrast to the otherwise trim precincts ; you passed close under it, a low wall guarding the descent into the fosse ; only, as you drew near to the frowning dusky gate, called the Norman Tower, which spanned the roadway, you became aware that close beneath the pendent mass of irregular Gothic buildings, that ran up at a sharp angle and merged into the Round Tower itself, someone was hard at work bringing chaos into order, and making the wilderness blossom like the rose. Little horizontal paths were being levelled along the slope, flowers bloomed engagingly among piled rockeries, trellises dripped with trailing roses. Civilisation seemed to be overcoming barbarism ; and there was evidently a mind at work there ; you might have said of it, as the innkeeper said contemptuously of





*Speaight & Co.*

MARY, LADY PONSONBY.  
Circa 1910.







the artistic signboard, "Somebody seems to have been doing this himself"; and the process went gradually on, producing the particular kind of surprising beauty which is evolved by the close contact of things young, delicate, and fanciful with things antique, massive, and rude—the snapdragon on the broken parapet, the wallflower in the crannied ashlar.

## II

But not till I became an Eton master, and was carried up one day by Edward Lyttelton, with whom I then lived, to lunch with Sir Henry Ponsonby, Queen Victoria's private secretary, did I realise that this was his garden, and approachable only through his house. The Norman Tower was one of those incredible residences only producible by the determination to contrive a modern civilised house inside an entirely uncompromising feudal fortress. It was approached by a steep stone stairway, and seemed to be like something out of the *Swiss Family Robinson*, not a place constructed by human skill, so much as a labyrinth delved and quarried out of a mass of craggy rocks. The deepset windows, the narrow winding passages, the loopholed embrasures, were like the linked excavations of a mine; and the surprise was to find a cheerful interior, curtained and carpeted, full of books and pictures and easeful commodities; and all, like the garden, not thoughtlessly regulated, but selected and controlled by some deftly guiding hand.

Sir Henry Ponsonby I had met already; and of him I would say that I have always remembered him as being, without any exception, the most perfectly and beautifully courteous man I have ever seen, so



unembarrassed, so resourceful, so entirely natural that for a time one hardly realised what a triumph of art, in a sense, his manner was, how singularly trained, adjusted, and applied to bring about the complete ease and security of any circle in which he found himself. He was a tall man, as I remember him, with a pointed beard, and with a slight stoop, dressed almost negligently, but with a quiet self-effacement and appropriateness that challenged neither attention nor comment. His greeting was cordial and reassuring, his talk easy and simple, but always with a personal cognisance of his companion. He listened respectfully and with a genuine interest, very flattering to a young and inexperienced man; and he had an ingratiating smile, with a low and appreciative laugh. He seemed to me the man of all others formed, both by nature and long use, to deprive of its natural terrors and awkwardnesses the access of a respectful subject to a much revered and awe-inspiring sovereign.

I was duly inducted and presented. It was a quiet family party: Sir Henry, Lady Ponsonby, two daughters, Edward Lyttelton, and myself.

Lady Ponsonby was very different to her husband, and I confess that my first impression was that, though I should feel instinctively and permanently at ease with Sir Henry, in any place or company, the case would be very different with Lady Ponsonby. She was entirely gracious and cordial in manner; but I felt that, though with Sir Henry I was taken, so to speak, for better and for worse, I was under a certain scrutiny with Lady Ponsonby, exposed to a just and charitable but still critical examination. I felt myself put on my mettle, sure that I should be



rewarded if I could earn any commendation, but that I should be regarded entirely on my own merits, and not in the light of any fortuitous or extraneous advantages. I do not mean that this was in the least disconcerting—indeed, it was decidedly stimulating; for I felt that if I did my best, and if it was of a certain quality, I should find a very generous and appreciative response, but that it involved a definite sort of obligation.

She was a very small woman, and moved with a quite unconscious stateliness and deliberation. She was not in the least like Queen Victoria, but yet she somehow reminded me of her. The one person whom she did always appear to me to resemble, not so much in feature as in air and expression, was the Comtesse de Paris. Lady Ponsonby's complexion was dark rather than pale; her under lip was a little protruded, which gave her at once a meditative and determined look. But her eyes were the most expressive of her features; the eyelids drooped a little, which gave one perhaps the sense of being narrowly or even secretly observed; and if she were surprised, or let us say ruffled, by anything that was said—for she was a woman with strong intellectual preferences and prejudices, and not tolerant of illogical or sentimental or nebulous views—she had a curiously impenetrable and even disconcerting glance, steady and judicial, which could arrest attention, convict of triviality, and even bring consternation to the sensitive mind. I am very far from implying that she was like Grandcourt in *Daniel Deronda*, given to looking stonily at smiling persons; she was kindly, considerate, and compassionate of shyness and awkwardness; but with pretentious, positive, affected



persons she had little patience, while anything like vulgarity she simply ignored; and she was not content to drift good-humouredly down an idle stream of talk—she brought her keen and critical intelligence into play, and paid her opponent the compliment of taking for granted that he was serious and diligent both in talk and opinion.

It is difficult to use hackneyed words with any effect, and I feel apologetic in using two words about Lady Ponsonby which have become almost shapeless from slovenly application. But I always felt her to be one of the most distinguished and high-bred people I ever knew. The quality of her mind was acute and keen-edged; she was not taken in by commonplaces and platitudes, however elaborately arrayed. She did one the honour of believing that one's opinions had some rational basis, and had been confirmed by observation. But she was at the same time catholic in her interests, did not demand a uniformity of type, or conformity to a preconceived standard of her own. She loved originality and freshness, and demanded vitality of thought rather than range and depth of culture. She did not profess to be a student or an authority, only a genuine amateur; but it mattered little what her companion was interested in, as long as he was not merely imitative and conventional in outlook.

I do not pretend that I discovered all this at my first interview. I was shy and somewhat abashed by my entry into a circle with definite and, as it seemed to me, decidedly august traditions of its own. But I did recognise her at once as a woman who was not merely dawdling passively along the highway of life, and taking things as they came; but as one who



was keeping a sharp look-out for any form of intellectual interest and emotional activity, who asked a good deal of life and got a good deal out of it by energetic exploration, brought ideas and people to a strict test, and threw a critical and sympathetic ardour into all she did.

I guessed, too, that there was probably a good deal in the background : that she did not regard talk merely as a more or less agreeable way of passing the time, but resented dullness and stolidity and did her best to disperse them. She had not the alarming air which some favoured personages whom I have known have exhibited, the air of sitting enthroned and seeming to say, "Come, amuse me if you can." It was not in the style of an Oriental monarch ; it was rather more a chivalrous sort of combat, a joust, in which you were invited to take a lance, and unhorse your adversary if you could, while you were aware that your opponent would have no objection to unhorsing you, if you proved negligent or disdainful.

I was fortunate that day ; if I did not exactly win my spurs, I kept my seat in the saddle. And then there was Sir Henry with his easy talk, full of echoes from the political and social world, touching off a humorous reminiscence in the fewest possible words, never sheltering himself behind the mysterious prestige of allusions, but "reminding" you courteously of things that you had never known or dreamed of. It was all very agreeable to one's self-respect, and gave a human nearness to what had seemed so very much guarded and unapproachable : the daughters full of liveliness, sympathy and humour, adroitly, but with no sense of diplomacy, heading back the talk, if it wandered, into the desired channels. If I give the



impression of its being forced or artificial, I have told my tale clumsily ; because the beauty of it all was its complete naturalness and zest, and the utter absence of any apparent method or programme ; and giving me personally the comfortable sense—" Well, in a certain light, and at a particular angle, and properly shepherded, my own talk will pass muster after all ! "—so that one went away pleased with one's hosts, pleased with the world, and not dissatisfied with oneself : a blissful combination !

## III

Then after that I was often at the house. They were very hospitable, I dined there frequently, and many interesting people came and went ; but my impression is rather that Lady Ponsonby's intimate friends, at all events in her later years, were more often women than men. I several times met Vernon Lee there, whose talk, though fitful and delivered in rather a *recherché* manner, was full of bright little points of light and well-touched phrases. Miss Ethel Smyth was a very frequent visitor, bursting with ideas and arguments and quick perceptions, galvanising the party to half-amused, half-irritated exuberance, and so briskly accumulating arguable points in her own decisive harangues that every interval of silence was claimed by three or four ardent champions, and it became a case of catching the speaker's eye. " I don't often claim the privilege of being the oldest person present," I remember Lady Ponsonby saying once, at one of these contested pauses, " but I do now—I *must* speak." Mrs. Cornish was often there, oracular and ironical, and Frank Cornish himself, with his sagacious and tolerant comments. But it



was by no means a coterie, though it contained a coterie. The Ponsonbys, like other conversational and ingenious families, had a little language of their own, recondite allusions and phrases such as "washing it off the block," which stood for the decisive abandonment of an outworn topic, or "Aunt Sister," which signified the sudden, helpless inability to face a stranger. The convenience of these phrases was that, like algebraical symbols, they summed up and expressed those complicated little social situations, which are of common occurrence, and yet if stated need somewhat lengthy explanation.

In all this talk Lady Ponsonby held a very definite place, and her talk had a very distinct quality. Her voice, a clear contralto, had an emphatic character; she used many French phrases, not produced, as sometimes is the case, for the sake of display, but because she had received all her early education from a remarkable French governess—so that she spoke of the personages of ancient history by their French appellations—and moreover because she read so much French that her thoughts took a French turn, and the ideas she thus expressed were such as had no exact equivalent in English; but it gave her talk a great piquancy, and this was increased by her having a rather clipped and hampered pronunciation of English, with a suspicion of a Northumbrian burr—she was a descendant of the great Earl Grey—which somehow added a cosmopolitan flavour to her speech. She was very outspoken in argument, and fearless in expressing her opinion, but she was not combative so much as judicial; and though she sometimes took the wind out of her opponents' sails, she was remarkably accessible to rational considerations, and more than most talkers



willing to admit that she had overlooked an important point. Many people reserve their candour for the prolonged exposition of their own opinions ; but Lady Ponsonby was concise in statement, and a really candid listener ; and she had a pleasant, dry little laugh, which took anything acid out of her ironies, and reassured her adversary. What she said was often critical, and could even be contemptuous ; but it was always an impersonal contempt, and she was never either peevish or petulant. The truth was that she played the game with great zest, and with a real desire for getting at the truth of opinions ; and just as in football a player may sometimes spill an opponent, no resentment is felt so long as the collision is incidental damage and not intentional injury. One was always conscious of her enjoyment and good-humour, and of a friendliness that was increased rather than diminished by honest disagreement. But she could be trenchant on occasions. I remember a guest, whom she knew well, maintaining some question of principle in a very persistent and one-sided way, and ending by saying, " I'm afraid you think me very heretical ! " " I don't mind how heretical people are," said Lady Ponsonby, with an enigmatic smile, " so long as they are not tedious ! "

I remember the pleasure it was to me when I suddenly realised that I was really inside the circle, and not merely an uninitiated guest. It was on a Sunday afternoon, and I was talking to Lady Ponsonby and one of her daughters in the little thick-walled sanctum she had over the Norman gate. The arrival of an expansive and far from interesting Windsor resident was announced. " Oh, horror ! " said Lady Ponsonby, " I suppose I must go. Won't you stay



here? It will soon be over, and I will come back.”

“No, it *won't* be soon over, mamma,” said Miss Maggie—“you know it won't. I'll sacrifice myself! She doesn't mind *who* she talks to, as long as it is *here*; and if I can't endure it, I'll send word!” So we talked on; and that little incident seemed a step upwards in intimacy. I found myself more and more at ease with her, and more and more surprised that I had ever thought her formidable. I suppose the fact was that she was not shy so much as diffident, though she always seemed the most resourceful and self-possessed of women, and that her apparent irony was really a little shield of defence. Indeed she recognised her own diffidence with a sad resignation, as though it were almost a disease, and did her best to encourage others not to yield to such morbidity. Yet she remained almost pathetically under the impression that she could not interest or amuse other people, when as a matter of fact almost everything she said, every change of facial expression, every smallest gesture, had for those who knew her a peculiar piquancy and significance. Even her little silences, which seemed so calculated and impressive, were not really deliberate. I remember commenting once—I was telling her that I had found her formidable—on the silence with which she had received a peculiarly ungracious and ill-timed remark. “It wasn't that,” she said; “it was only that I couldn't think of anything to say.”

She was a very able and cultivated woman. One is apt to think that one's mind can take care of itself, and that if in early life perceptions are quick and expression facile, no more need be done; but it is a great mistake, for as the generations move on,



one becomes stranded. Lady Ponsonby never made that mistake. Her culture was not all-embracing—there were regions and intellectual tracts which she did not pretend to have penetrated or traversed—but she never slid into indolent ways. I do not think she had a poetical or romantic mind ; but she was deeply interested in ideas, in character, in life ; she preferred philosophy to religion ; that is to say, she approached life critically rather than mystically. She read, as I have said, a great deal of French—memoirs, essays, novels ; and began to learn Spanish when, as she said, “ she had one foot in the grave ” ; but she had not the imaginative nor the creative gift. She once wrote an essay on Pascal ; it had perception, discrimination, and width of view, and was illuminated by touches of shrewdness and humour ; but it had little literary form or balance ; indeed I remember thinking that her talk about Pascal was infinitely more fresh and vigorous than her writing. She liked approaching a subject at vivid and brilliant points—she had little *sostenuto* ; but she read constantly and carefully—she did not skim or pounce ; she meditated and adjudged, and so her mind never lost its edge, and never got either stale or listless.

I doubt if she cared at all for society in the vague sense of the word. Court society is dignified rather than lively. Politicians and public men enter it in a non-committal spirit, not for the sake of stimulus, so much as to avoid misunderstanding or friction, to grease the wheels of the machine. Sir Henry was, of course, in constant requisition. I remember dinner-parties there, when he had received a belated invitation to a Royal banquet at a late hour—Queen Victoria dined at a quarter to nine—and how he



used to appear in his own drawing-room in Windsor uniform and orders, take in a lady to dinner, sit at the head of the table talking delightfully but neither eating or drinking ; and halfway through dinner slip quietly away. But Lady Ponsonby lived on the whole a self-contained life, though when she joined the royal circle, she probably got more out of interesting and distinguished guests than most of the company. Her diary, which exists, and extracts from which I have seen, is full of interesting reminiscences, because she seldom kept people at arm's length. That did not interest her in the least ; there was close contact, and sometimes ingenuous collision.

As Miss Bulteel, before her marriage, she had been a maid-of-honour, and had formed a very close and intimate friendship with Queen Victoria. Indeed, I am inclined to think that Lady Ponsonby understood the character and temperament of the Queen, which in spite of her apparent simplicity was really a very complex, impassioned, and emphatic character, better than anyone, even than Mr. Strachey ! The Queen saw in Lady Ponsonby, as well as in Sir Henry, the one trait which she had the wisdom to value above all other traits in those about her, a fundamental honesty, which never ultimately sacrificed truth to respect and courtesy. One remembers Queen Victoria's lament over the fact that in her widowhood there were so few people who could tell her the exact truth, but Lady Ponsonby was one of these. It was not that everything always went smoothly between them. There was an occasion when the Queen asked Sir Henry to choose the time for his holiday ; this afterwards proved inconvenient to the Queen, and she took it into her head that Lady



Ponsonby was not sufficiently considerate in wishing to stand by the arrangement. As a matter of fact, Lady Ponsonby was perfectly willing to change the time, but intimations were given her that she was expected to express regret for her behaviour, which, as she had nothing to regret, she declined to do. For a short time the Queen held no communication with her, but as Lady Ponsonby continued resolute, the Queen at last said with admirable humour that it was of no use punishing Mary Ponsonby, when she did not seem even to know that she was being punished! and peace was consequently restored.

## IV

Another very marked characteristic of Lady Ponsonby was her ceaseless activity. "Where are your occupations?" she would say to her children, when they entered the room. Both brain and hand were restless; she liked exploring ideas and characters; she liked making things. To me some of her occupations were as mysterious as Dr. Johnson's rectangles of dried orange-peel. There were sounds, fumes, odours from the dark-walled workshop. She would distil perfumes, compose confections, bind books, carve wood, turn on a lathe, belabour little dishes and pipkins of silver or brass into civilised, even artistic shapes. She painted in water-colours and drew up to within a few weeks of her death. She loved all handicraft, and the talk of craftsmen. This, however, was mostly hearsay to me, for these things were recreative and restorative rather than creative, and she made light of her failures. I do not think she cared much for exercise in the accepted sense, though she loved the country and outdoor life, and



enjoyed gardening and planning effects; but I doubt if she had the true gardener's instinct of making vegetable personalities do what *you* like by the simple process of beguiling them into thinking that it is what *they* like. I do not think she had the educative impulse at all; she did not want to influence people, or to proselytise, or to have followers; she had an immense appetite for liberty herself, and she respected it in the case of others. It always struck me that the sons and daughters of the house had been subject to no repressive or coercive processes, except those of honour, reason, common sense, and affection. They had the delightful and harmless freedom of speech and opinion which comes from never having been dragooned. I could not imagine that they had ever been required to finish what was on their plate, or told that little people must be seen and not heard. That, after all, is only the resource of parents who are unable to illustrate their own opinions by attractive conduct. In Sir Henry and Lady Ponsonby the children had all the stimulus of a contagious example, gallant self-possession and self-effacing courtesy.

Then, too, Lady Ponsonby had never any time to spare. Ennui was intolerable to her. When she was interested, she never allowed anything to interrupt her. These crafts and hobbies were the tools with which she fought against vacancy. A Court—though after her marriage she held no official position in the Household—is an easy place to waste time in, because its smallest occupations have a flavour of importance. When Milton wrote, “They also serve who only stand and wait,” he devised a dignified excuse for the vacuity of people who have



to sacrifice their own pursuits to the convenience of those who have the right to say that they will not be kept waiting. But of all the titles which are current in Courts the one that would have fitted Lady Ponsonby least was the title of Lady-in-waiting. Loitering was the one thing she could not bear to do. And she escaped, too, the mental dilapidation which comes from the habitual practice of deference. Continual deference is apt to degrade a character, by destroying its sense of values ; and the shadow which dogs the close contact with exalted rank is the sense that rank is in itself honourable. It is fatuous to ignore rank, because through the imagination it affects the subconscious mind which is impervious to reason ; and if rank is accompanied by a realisation of duty and responsibility, it can produce a noble kind of patience which is not thrown away. But Lady Ponsonby was far too critical to be taken in by rank. It played no part at all in her thoughts ; neither did she over-value superficial brilliance. Her one interest was in solidities of character and activities of temperament. An epigram not based on experience was to her a mere form of words.

A character of quick and shallow perceptions, living in a Court atmosphere, often tends to suffer from an inverted kind of vulgarity, and amuses itself by detecting and scenting snobbishness everywhere. But Lady Ponsonby never thought about it at all. She was greatly amused, I remember, at the story of the elderly gentleman who refused all nourishment, but whose life was prolonged by the simple expedient of persuading him that the grapes and partridges served to him were the gift of an anonymous baronet. " In that case," he said, " he must really



show his gratitude by making an effort to partake of them." But the detection of snobbishness never gave her any recreation, for the simple reason that she did not suspect others of giving way to a feeling which was so foreign to her own temperament. So she gradually abjured all vague sociabilities, with the result that when Sir Henry's death and the termination of the old Court life threw her upon her own resources, she suffered very little from the dreariness which is apt to fall upon those who are translated suddenly out of a life of publicity into a life of solitary leisure.

## v

She settled in a house at Ascot, among pinewoods and grey sandy roads, and she was granted the life-tenancy of a little house within the precincts of St. James's Palace. Perhaps she missed to a certain extent the mere going and coming of a royal establishment. It is more easy to appreciate the leisure that is deliberately won from the entanglements of a life of bustle, than to enjoy it when it becomes the staple of the day. But there was never any sign of this deprivation about her. She had her handicrafts, her books, her friends, and she preserved her activities to a great age, up to a time of life at which even the energetic are apt to sink into the pleasures of mere apathetic routine.

I saw, after this date, very much less of her than before; but we corresponded with considerable regularity. Her letters, written in a big bold, uncompromising hand, without a touch either of ornament or indefiniteness, were very characteristic in their ardour, their vividness, their personal handling, and the pleasant touches of humour and irony,



seldom intolerant and never caustic ; and most of all in their genuine and outspoken affectionateness.

I remember very well going to see her once in London when she had reached a patriarchal age. I went in the middle of the afternoon to get a quiet *tête-à-tête* before tea ; and I found her just the same, talking of her age as an experience principally amusing because it brought with it, to her surprise, no blurring of intellectual or emotional perception. And it was clear enough that this was so, for there was no sense whatever of suspended vitality or submissiveness. People drifted in, and when I would have gone, she made the familiar little gesture, which indicated that she wished me to stay on. We settled down, she, Miss Maggie, and I, to a solid further talk, and brought our minds largely and fully to bear on the peculiarities and inconsistencies of our mutual friends. She related with exquisite delight the manoeuvres of a rather mystical acquaintance, the intricate evolutions in which she disguised the simplest enterprises, the rejection of all motives for action except the most tortuous and surprising. “ If she were in this room now,” said Lady Ponsonby, “ and wished to leave the house, she could not bear to go out of the door and down the front stairs. She would only be happy if she could creep down the back stairs, and scramble out of the pantry window.” The time passed rapidly ; a bell rang in the house. “ You’ll stay to dinner, won’t you ? ” said Lady Ponsonby.

That was the last time that I saw her ; and it is not only useless now to regret that I did not make more opportunities to keep in repair a friendship of which I was so proud and which I so deeply valued, but I also feel that she would very much have dis-



liked any dwelling unduly upon vain remorse. She always said that unavailing regret was a waste of good emotion, a sentimentality for which there was no excuse. Resentment was an impossibility to her generous nature, and the last thing she would ever have accused a friend of was a want of loyalty. She never took refuge in the pathetic stronghold; she would have despised it in others, as she despised it in herself. I remember how she applauded the words of Mrs. Charles Kingsley in a story I once told her. "Whenever I find myself thinking too much about Charles," Mrs. Kingsley said, "I get out the most exciting novel that I can find, and read it with all my might—hearts were made to love with, not to break!" And so I take refuge in the thought that one whose perceptions were so candid and whose discrimination was so shrewd, did yet find room for me in her large and generous heart, and left the door unlatched until the end.



## V

### MRS. OLIPHANT

#### I

THERE is a pleasant and seemly custom at Eton, that the procession which enters the chapel at the beginning of every service is headed by the twenty Sixth-Form boys, ten Collegers and ten Oppidans, two abreast, the Collegers in their black gowns. The latter are, so to speak, soon side-tracked ; for they diverge at once to their seat to the right of the chapel door ; but the Oppidans continue their course up the central passage between the boys' seats—which face sideways and choir-wise, not eastwards—and diverge to their seat behind the choir, up the first gangway.

It was, when I entered Eton in 1874, an even more solemn affair than it is now, because it was the ritual for the Oppidans to carry into chapel with them their tall hats, which were considerably taller than is now the fashion ; but they did not carry them held down by their flanks, but in front of their chests, by the brim, as one might carry some consecrated vessel, the eyes of each hat-bearer being precisely on a level with the top of the hat. It now appears to me, reflecting on it, to have been a quite abnormally grotesque affair ; but at the time, and with the submissive small-boy habit of accepting whatever is, as not only right, but unquestionable and immutable,





*Speaight & Co.*

MARGARET OLIPHANT.

From a drawing by Janet Mary Oliphant. By kind permission of Messrs. Blackwood.  
Circa 1880.







the ceremony invested with a peculiar awe and majesty the procession of what appeared to me to be elderly whiskered men—for several of them, such as Alfred Lyttelton and the present Lord Midleton, wore thick, sausage-shaped whiskers reaching down to the point of the jaw. The only exception to the hat-ritual was Alfred Lyttelton himself, who swung his headgear gaily in his hand, and looked about him with a cheerful and almost monarchical air—the most splendid figure, for glory and worship, that my eyes had ever rested upon.

But at the end of the procession of Oppidans, came a very different figure, neither whiskered nor elderly, a small, lightly-built, curly-haired boy, handsome, attractive-looking, stepping rather jauntily and with an air of entirely unembarrassed amusement—indeed a charming-looking creature, with an expression which seemed at once sensitive, impressionable, and whimsical.

A few days later I found myself, then a boy of twelve, included, in my tutor's pupil-room, to my terror and amazement, in a set of senior boys for Sunday lectures; and there, to my astonishment, I saw, in the place of honour by the door, the same adorable person, talking in a brisk and delightful way to his neighbours, before my tutor entered with his pile of books, and then sitting, with a demureness that became him, not only listening to, but actually taking notes of, my tutor's learned discourses.

About the same time, among the juniors, in a little Homer class, I found myself sitting next a very quiet boy, with a highly animated and I thought roguish expression, with bright black beady eyes, very friendly and amiable, but decidedly silent;



and then I learned that this was the younger brother of the other paragon, and that their name was Oliphant; and that they did not board in the house, but lived in Windsor with their mother. Just before I came to Eton I had been given a book by an old friend of my father's, *The Makers of Florence*, by Mrs. Oliphant; and one by one the links emerged. It proved to be the same Mrs. Oliphant, then a well-known authoress.

And then I became aware that a quiet-looking, grey-haired widow lady, who came often to the service at Eton, was Mrs. Oliphant herself. Her face comes very clearly before me as I write. She carried her head with dignity, and had an upward look; but her eyes were usually cast down, though when she opened them, they were dark, bright and penetrating. She was comely, and would indeed have been beautiful, if it had not been for her mouth, which had something roughly shaped and abrupt about it, the upper lip projecting sharply over the lower. About the whole face there was a look of reserve, even of endurance, more of repression than of suppression, as if a naturally expansive and genial nature had been thwarted and baffled.

I cannot say that I ever in any degree knew Mrs. Oliphant, though later on I met her several times. She wrote of herself as tongue-tied, and as not given to explanations or public appearances; but added that she believed herself to possess the faculty of encouraging other people, or rather *some* other people, to talk.

I do not remember that this was the case. She certainly talked very little herself, and that with a gentle decisiveness, the words dispensed with a



cautious precision. But it was in no sense an ungenial silence, nor with any freezing quality. It was more that she maintained a tolerant and spectatorial attitude, kindly and appreciative, but as though she had no particular responsibility for the contentment of the company.

The elder son, Cyril, I had just heard talk, listening, as a small boy may listen, one of a crowd of supers, to the conversation of bigger boys. But there was a whimsical and sparkling quality about it; and he was certainly thought very amusing and companionable; in later days when I occasionally met him, his health was indifferent, and he had definitely joined the tribe of leisurely amateurs, with no particular standing or work in the world.

But *Cecco*, as the younger brother was called, I knew very fairly well; I sate next him constantly in my tutor's pupil-room. I was myself an outdoor pupil, and after the evening work had to go back to College, while *Cecco* slept at home in Windsor, having a room in my tutor's house, but only used by day. The result of which was that for three or four years I often walked away with him, and talked, as far as our ways lay together. I used to turn in at the big gate of College, and see the little figure, with the stiffly-poised big head and small limbs, strolling away unconcernedly up the lighted street.

He was certainly a very original and attractive creature, petulant and ironical, sometimes very silent and disdainful, sometimes conversational and provocative, with a light and sarcastic touch. He had many queer interests, such as heraldry and genealogy. But one scene remains in my mind very sharply distinct. We used on Sundays to be with my tutor



for nearly an hour, between one and two, the dinner hour being two. He lectured, sometimes on Church History, and often, out of a very full and accurate mind, on Dante, translating a passage and then commenting on it. I am afraid that my attention was not impeccable, and I have often since wished that I could get anyone to perform the same kind of office for me now ! Cecco used to make preparations for a show, at all events, of studious diligence, lay a Dante on the table, and then behind it place a large notebook full of entries ; and while the lecture proceeded, slowly inscribe notes, with the air of a wood-engraver rather than of a writer, the entries were so deliberate and intricate.

One dreadful day—I do not know what aroused his suspicions—my tutor suddenly paused in his exposition, and said, “ Oliphant, will you bring up your notebook to me ? ” Cecco arose, reluctantly, but with an irrepressibly humorous enjoyment of the situation, and handed in the book.

It turned out that the whole volume had been devoted to making out the casts of plays—the Oliphant circle was then very fond of little extemporised dramatic performances—and the entries were merely lists of *dramatis personæ*, with each part carefully assigned to some member of the home group. My tutor was naturally annoyed, but a great deal more amused. Cecco was sent back to his place—I suppose he was then a boy of sixteen or seventeen—and told to wait afterwards ; but we never heard any more of the incident, except that Cecco, on being questioned about it, would only say, “ My tutor seemed to think it was very wrong, but he was quite unable to explain *why* ! ”



## II

These little pictures have been evoked for me by reading the *Autobiography and Letters of Mrs. Oliphant*, 1899, of which I can only say that it seems to me one of the most pathetic and heartbreaking revelations I have ever read. Mrs. Oliphant was brought up in a very quiet way, her father being a custom-house official in Glasgow and afterwards in Liverpool, and her mother, it would seem, an extremely brilliant and able woman, with a remarkable gift of conversation and vivid narrative, very like what Mrs. Carlyle must have been in her happiest days, with the touch of sultry irony omitted.

Mrs. Oliphant married young, her husband being also her first-cousin, an artist of a somewhat unpractical kind, much engaged in designing cartoons for stained-glass windows; and how unpractical may be gauged from the fact that he lost a valuable partnership, his would-be partner saying drily, after an inspection of Mr. Oliphant's books, that he congratulated him that his circumstances permitted him to be so indifferent to profit.

But Mrs. Oliphant's troubles began early. She lost an infant child, and her husband developed consumption. They drifted out to Italy, where he died, very courageously, and even without any visible anxiety, though he left his young widow with three children and over a thousand pounds of debt.

Mrs. Oliphant had already begun writing for *Blackwood*; and now the necessity of earning a livelihood gave an additional stimulus. For the next fifty years she lived by her pen, making a considerable and steady income, though without great successes,



but enabling her to live comfortably and send her boys to Eton and Oxford.

No doubt, if she had had leisure to write on more studied lines, she could have been a much better writer. Her books often begin well, even brilliantly ; but the interest is apt to flag, and they tail off in many cases to a hurried and mechanical close.

“ I remember,” she writes, “ that I said to myself, having then perhaps a little stirring of ambition, that I must make up my mind to think no more of that, and that to bring up the boys for the service of God was better than to write a fine novel, supposing even that it was in me to do so. . . . It seemed rather a fine thing to make that resolution, though in reality I had no choice ; but now I think that if I had taken the other way, which seemed the less noble, it might have been better for all of us. I might have done better work. . . . Who can tell ? I did with much labour what I thought the best, and there is only a *might have been* on the other side.

“ In this my resolution . . . I was, after all, only following my own instincts, it being really easier for me to keep on with a flowing sail, to keep my household and make a number of people comfortable, at the cost of incessant work, and an occasional great crisis of anxiety, than to live the self-restrained life which the greater artist imposes on himself.

“ What casuists we are on our own behalf !—this is altogether self-defence. And I know I am giving myself the air of being *au fond* a finer sort of character than the others. I may as well take the little satisfaction to myself, for no one will give it me.”

That was Mrs. Oliphant’s own mature view ; and the diary is very explicit as to the strange, and in



many ways rather dreadful, life led by this passionately affectionate, dutiful, and industrious woman.

She had lost her eldest daughter, as a child of four or five, in Rome ; and after that she lived for her sons. They were to have, in a quiet way, the best of everything. Cyril was wonderfully, almost precociously clever ; she tells how, almost without preparation and quite unexpectedly, he won the Prince Consort's prize for French at Eton at a very early age ; and then too he had great personal attractions and charm of manner ; it seemed as though any success might be awaiting him. Cecco was almost as gifted, but he was shy and retiring, and had many rather unusual hobbies ; and then—for Mrs. Oliphant had a strong clannish sentiment about family ties—she took into her household her brother's eldest son, Frank Oliphant, a blameless, able, hard-headed, and friendly boy, destined for an Indian career.

Perhaps it may be said that she spoilt her sons ; she dealt very little in admonition or precept, and they were not wilful or headstrong boys, needing coercive discipline. The household of four were all deeply attached, even devoted, to each other, while her own love for her boys had something almost morbidly passionate about it. She stood between them and life, warded off every sort of trouble and discomfort, and arranged everything for their pleasure and enjoyment. She was hospitable, and very fond of arranging little domestic fêtes, dramatic performances for winter evenings, water-parties and excursions for the long summer days ; and she herself seemed to have nothing to do except to manage matters for the young people and to share their delightful and delighted companionship.



When, then, was this enormous mass of writing done—for Mrs. Oliphant published over a hundred volumes, novels, biographies, and historical miscellanies?

She had very strong and unbroken health, and when the household retired to bed, she went off to her room, where she wrote until two or three in the morning; and it is clear that her work was highly congenial to her, and saved her from the anxious brooding and foreboding which is the shadow of all passionate affection.

At times she was in great straits. On one occasion she relates how she was faced with an empty exchequer and a pile of completed MSS., which she was quite unable to place; and was only saved from what looked like ruin by an offer from the *Graphic* of £1,300 for a serial novel. But though in a sense she lived from hand to mouth, for she saved nothing, and her death at any time would have left her sons entirely unprovided for, yet she contrived to earn a large income sufficient for her personal needs. Her cares were added to by her eldest brother, hopelessly invalided, with two or three girls, drifting back to England. But Mrs. Oliphant, with open-hearted generosity, took them all in permanently. Her brother declined to make any attempt to support himself; he took his meals, read his paper, went out for his walk, and was neither conciliatory nor considerate; but she bore the burden of his maintenance and exacting presence till his death, and adopted his daughters as her own.

The eldest son Cyril came to some grief at Oxford, went out as Secretary to the Governor of Ceylon, returning home soon after, hopelessly invalided. After



which he lived at home an idle and self-indulgent life, doing a little writing when it pleased him ; and no more melancholy decadence than that of the vivid and sparkling Eton-boy into the elderly and deprecating loafer, dawdling about Eton and Windsor, could well be imagined. The younger, Cecco, took some downward steps in the same direction, but righted himself ; and though his health prevented him from obtaining congenial work, he lived a studious life at home, and was the confidant and comrade of his mother to the end of his brief life. The sons died respectively in 1890 and 1894 ; the passage in which, bravely and frankly, Mrs. Oliphant tells the story of the tragical downfall, without a word of excuse, or the least abatement of her eager and all-forgiving love, is one of the most poignant episodes that exist in any published autobiography.

The Letters, which occupy the greater part of the book, are in no way remarkable ; though here and there in the autobiography is sketched one of the most lovable portraits of Thomas Carlyle and his wife that exist. They seem to have shown Mrs. Oliphant the best and kindest side of their character. There is a narrative of how Mrs. Carlyle called, a little, bright-eyed, hollow-cheeked lady, black-haired and keen-featured, took Mrs. Oliphant out for a drive in a homely brougham, and told her the story of her childhood, and how Edward Irving, then a student of twenty, in all the radiance of his youthful beauty, set her up, as a child of six, on the table opposite him to be on his level, and taught her her Latin verbs.

And, again, there is a characteristic story of



Tennyson. When Mrs. Oliphant first made his acquaintance, she and Lady Tennyson sate demurely enough together, exchanging compliments and courtesies, while Tennyson, dark-skinned and saturnine, with flowing hair and ragged beard, stood over them, like a brooding thundercloud, and suddenly burst out with the encouraging and sustaining remark, "What liars you women are!"

But these stories are rarely interspersed, though there is much interesting characterisation, and charming scraps of description. The autobiography for the most part—it was meant for her boys—keeps pretty closely to the central thread; and is, I think, one of the most illuminating literary documents I know, though at the same time one loses oneself in wonder as to how any work at all, to say nothing of really good and solid work, could have been turned out under such urgent stress of circumstances; and yet one gets the impression that, in spite of her sorrows, it was on the whole a decidedly happy life.

And as for her books themselves, there was probably nothing of quite first-rate quality. That was certainly sacrificed. The biographical and historical books are careful, interesting, and readable; but whenever they attempt to criticise, there is no depth of insight or happy illumination. The judgments are just the opinions of a fairly cultivated, rather conventional mind. Then there are the supernatural stories. Mrs. Oliphant had a profound interest, as one who lived so wholly in love and sympathy was bound to have, in all problems of after-life and the prolongation of identity; for she did not love those whom she loved either critically or spiritually, she loved them for being, or as being, exactly what they were, object-



ing to nothing, and needing no excuses. *The Beleaguered City*, *The Wizard's Son*, *The Little Pilgrim in the Unseen*, have all an atmosphere of great reality and poignancy ; but one feels all the time that what they need is omission, compression, and a greater intentness and tightness of handling.

When it comes to novels of homely life and character, she is on surer ground. Her grasp of temperament, her creative gift, are conspicuous. The whole scene is vivid and dramatic. But in most of them there comes a lapse of mood ; the situations flag, the aim of the book becomes hazy and uncertain. It was just what one would have expected. She was really a great improvisatore, with "a hurried frankness of execution," as Scott wrote of himself, and yet without Scott's sustaining genius. I find myself doubting whether more deliberation and adjustment would really have produced better books, though it might have produced better technique. But her books are rather vivid glimpses of life than a true and firm criticism of life. I doubt if she wished them to have been more, or whether any exertion would have made them much better.

What remains is the picture of a beautiful nature, abounding in love, a little petulant at times, a little wilful, and more than a little bewildered by the inconsequence and tragedy of life. The whole strikes one as a gallant and improvised struggle, renewed day after day, with extreme generosity and nobleness, but failing, if it did fail, from the fact that she had no time to meditate or analyse, but hurried on, the victim, almost, both of love and circumstance, her ties one by one broken, and the last years a tragic and almost stoical conflict between memory and



desolation. Yet it is a book which not only makes one think more admiringly of human nature, but also gives one, as much as any book can, a hint of immortality, for the simple reason that such unfulfilled love, which yet preserved its freshness to the end, has a certain quality of indestructibility about it, and leaps into the dark like a flaming meteor, on an unimaginable quest, and with a vitality which seems indomitable and unquenchable.









JAMES LEIGH JOYNER,  
Lower Master of Eton, 1878-1887.



## VI

J. L. JOYNES

ONE of the great disadvantages of the dress and *tenue* of the present generation is that, so far as *men* go, everyone tends to look more or less like everyone else. There are few sharp and decisive demarcations of attire and deportment, which used, when I was a boy, to divide men conveniently into generations, so that at a glance they could be unhesitatingly referred to a particular stratum and era of life. Nowadays, if a man's hair does not turn white or disappear altogether, if time does not "delve the parallels on beauty's brow," it is not always easy to tell a Professor from an undergraduate, though perhaps the undergraduate would not cordially endorse the statement.

When I went as a small boy to Eton it was very different. It is true that the elder boys, with their sausage-shaped whiskers, would now be regarded by an undergraduate as clearly belonging to the ancients. But no one could have confused them with the older masters, whose age, to judge by their appearance, one felt could hardly be assessed in Arabic numerals, but would require algebraical symbols or logarithms.

They wore then, if it can be believed, great hats of a peculiar tallness, rich in substance rather than glossy; high, crumpled, cheek-scraping Gladstone



collars, the danger of which seemed to be that a sudden movement might cause the collar point to pierce the eyeball—but then no *sudden* movements were made by such as these! A big white tie, negligently tied, in the shape of the sails of a wind-mill; a soft pleated shirt-front, a frock-coat often of black broadcloth, dark trousers, which looked in their uncompromising creases as though they were made of painted metal, the legs having a marked tendency to assume a corkscrew shape, and boots of great size and rigidity, resembling small boats;—far-off their coming shone!

This is no exaggeration; among the Fellows and senior masters there were several such figures. They moved stiffly, like men encased in armour, they spoke gruffly, they dissembled both Christian graces and virtues; the one emotion they inspired was awe; yet if you came by any chance to know them, they turned out to be mild, kindly, reasonable people, not in the least corresponding to their panoply and countenance.

The next generation of masters had a touch of modernity about them. Their collars were less obtrusive, their ties had the semblance of a bow. They wore morning coats and their movements were less hampered. But in one respect they were distinguished from their younger colleagues. They shaved only the upper lip, a fashion which has a curiously distorting effect upon the human mouth, making it appear like an orifice into which something requires to be slipped or posted. It was a fashion, I believe, originally invented by Cardinal Bellarmine, but it was one of those deleterious arrangements which one can conceive of as having been *invented*; the only incon-



ceivable thing is that it should ever have been repeated.

Yet in the early seventies such figures walked the streets of Eton and aroused neither astonishment nor terror. They preached, taught, conversed like other men, though they never seemed to take active physical exercise.

One of these figures, but with the marked difference of an extreme juvenility of motion, was the Rev. James Leigh Joynes, formerly known as “ Jimmy,” but on whom later generations of Etonians had conferred the supreme brevet of affection and respect, the simple title of “ Old.” To be called “ Old ” by everyone at a comparatively early age is an honour only to be earned by unfailing kindness.

He was born in 1824, one of five active and able men, sons of the Rector of Gravesend. He was just fifty when I went to Eton. He had been a boy there, and had won almost every schoolboy honour. He played for five successive years in “ Collegers and Oppidans,” he was by far the best fives player in the school. He was “ sent up ” for good no less than forty-six times, he was President of Pop, Newcastle Scholar, Captain of the School. He was modest, kindly, and universally popular ; and he was gratefully remembered by his schoolfellows for the fact that he set his face firmly and courageously against all bullying and oppression, all improper talk and undesirable habits. This was resented by some, but resented in silence, for slander, malice, and ridicule were alike genially ignored by Joynes.

He went to King’s as a Scholar, won a University prize or two, and returned to Eton as a master and a Fellow of King’s in 1849.



He was a very successful housemaster (at Keate House) and tutor. Many of his pupils—among whom were Sidney Herbert,<sup>1</sup> Swinburne, Lord Kinnaird, and the late Duke of Argyll—rose to high eminence. He played fives for many years with the boys, and his pair were very rarely beaten.

As a teacher he was an admirable disciplinarian; he seldom or never set a punishment; he had the gift of very ironical and caustic speech, delivered with extreme fatherliness, in a tone of grave concern and evangelical piety. I have been told a story by an eyewitness of the way in which he handled a loutish, thoroughly ill-conditioned boy, whom I will tactfully call Abbot, who began by making himself deliberately offensive. Old Joynes brought up his batteries with smiling unconcern. He never lost his temper, but he watched his opportunity. Abbot brought paper into school, and holding it under the desk, proceeded to write a punishment for another master. "Abbot, Abbot," said Joynes admiringly, "what can you be doing? Look at Abbot, boys. There he sits, inditing a sonnet perhaps to his lady's eyebrow. Ah, he's a fortunate fellow, Abbot—'Di tibi divitias dederunt et Di tibi formam.'"

By this time everyone was giggling, and Abbot made a sulky rejoinder. "Abbot, we don't talk like that here! Come, take your book, and stand in the corner, there's a good boy!" The wretched Abbot, seeing that the fates were against him and hoping to propitiate his castigator, heavily obeyed. But old Joynes had not finished his basting. Abbot stood with his back to the room. "Now, boys," said Joynes, "look at Abbot; what a good

<sup>1</sup> 14th Earl of Pembroke.



boy he is ! How obedient ! Many boys, if I had told them to stand in the corner, would have said ‘ Joynes, Joynes, who’s Joynes ? ’ But Abbot takes his book and stands in the corner, as good as gold.” It was simple enough, but entirely effective. There was nothing tyrannical or resentful about it. Abbot on coming to his senses was left in peace ; and nobody felt inclined to try further a fall with Joynes.

As for his teaching, it was sound, old-fashioned Eton scholarship, which was a curious little exotic bloom of culture, conventional and narrow, and based upon a minute acquaintance with two or three authors. There was no great width of erudition in it, nor did it exactly stimulate thought ; but it consisted in a very nice appreciation of certain literary values, arrived at by a constant comparison of passages : and here lay its virtue, that it was *arrived at*, and not *crammed in*. The old Eton scholars knew Horace by heart, and there was endless quotation and illustration, both of words and phrases. It was not scientific, and the grammar was fanciful, but the method was good. It did not develop originality, because the ideal of composition that was held up was not to use Latin in a Horatian way, but to work in Horatian tags into a very delicate piece of mosaic. But the effect of it on an original mind, like that of William Cory, was that it enabled him to produce a book like *Lucretilis*, which Munro said was the most Horatian thing ever written since Horace, and which owes its unique and delicate charm to the fact that one finds in it real poetry, full of exquisite feeling and pictorial description, yet all run into a Horatian mould.

Joynes was a hardworking and conscientious man,



but tough and wiry as he was, he had a touch of valetudinarianism about him, felt the strain of his work, and disliked responsibility, though he never shirked it.

There is a well-known caricature in *Vanity Fair* of Joynes standing in cap and gown, brandishing a birch and pointing with an air at once sinister and pastoral to the flogging-block: he at least was prepared to do his part! The half-closed eyes, with their dull shadows, the big devouring mouth, give the picture a grim quality. I believe that if as a small boy before I went to school I had been shown the picture, it would have terrified me profoundly, and even mingled with my dreams; indeed at best there is something ugly, some touch of primitive horror about it. It was like the original in a sense, but only in one, and that a rare mood. But the truth is that the appearance of Joynes was very singular. He was short and broad and very strongly built, his small and sturdy legs slightly bowed outwards. He looked and was extremely active; he ran rather than walked, his big feet twinkling along, and rounded corners at a great pace with a suggestion of a caper.

He had a large head with marked features which, in combination with his short stature, gave him a somewhat gnome-like aspect, a large aquiline nose, stiff, wiry, upstanding hair, grizzled and cut short, and a short "Newgate fringe," with shaven lips. His complexion was pale and dull, his eyes somewhat sunken; his mouth wide and large, and full of big white teeth, the indenting lines from the nose to the ends of the mouth very marked. But there was never a face which showed such marked alternations of expression. The general expression of his face was



grave even to melancholy, and preoccupied, one would have said, with sad thoughts. But he had a very quick and irradiating smile when his mouth opened up along all its lines, accompanied with a rapid upward jerk of his eyebrows. His face was never still for a moment when he talked, but twitched and darted curiously; and he had a sudden, loud, almost harsh laugh, almost frighteningly boisterous, and full of goodnature, which he delivered *pleno ore*, so that one saw displayed his big white teeth, and which ceased as instantaneously as it had begun. It was a very impressive face in repose, mournful, weary, brooding; and this gave it an almost dramatic quality as he talked, because of its lively motions.

He was very kind and fatherly in manner, recognising one and repeating one's name in a comfortable and welcoming way. His voice was strong and pitched rather low, with a serious accent; the tone full of goodwill and geniality as he talked, but in general talk it often sounded as though he were uttering private reflections aloud rather than conversing. He had a marked pronunciation, clipping some words rather short, prolonging and broadening vowels; altogether an unusual figure, at first sight disconcerting and even alarming, but with a paternal geniality showing through.

It was in 1877 that one of the Fellows died, and Francis Durnford, the Lower Master, became a Fellow. Joynes succeeded him as Lower Master, and I well remember how we saw the then Captain of the School, going off carrying a birch tied up with blue ribbons, which according to custom was always formally presented to a new Lower Master.

It was an immense surprise to me when I first heard



Joynes preach in chapel. I had expected something commonplace, possibly even absurd. He trotted, a little nervously, to the pulpit behind the verger, in a full surplice, broad black scarf, ample hood. To my surprise, he gave out his text in a grave and resonant voice, and launched into a discourse, admirably phrased, serious and tender, with a moving appeal to walk unflinchingly in the path of humble duty and simple goodness; it was deeply impressive; it came unaffectedly from the depths of his heart, and its earnest piety and fatherly affection were unmistakable. We were accustomed, I must add, to very different sermons. Hornby was a clear and impressive preacher, but his sermons were pitched, both intellectually and morally, almost too high. The old Fellows of Eton, who occupied the pulpit as a rule, were lengthy, tedious, entirely uninspiring. But Joynes delivered a personal message, within the comprehension of all his hearers. A later sermon, on Trinity Sunday, afterwards printed, was really a fine piece of majestic eloquence, and treated the symbolism of the doctrine in a high poetical vein.

But the scene of Joynes's ministrations was generally the Lower Chapel; and I think it is worth recording carefully what kind of a place in the early eighties was considered fit for small boys, many of them, no doubt, with seemly traditions of home churchgoing, to worship in. The room was opposite the racquet courts, and had been built originally out of the cheapest yellow brick for a musical practice-room. It had a wooden roof, supporting purple slates, and tied together by iron rods. The walls were of thin brick, lightly washed with a kind of buff *tempera*, the



lower part only being plastered. The boys sate in mean stained deal pews, closely packed together. There was a shallow alcove at the east, adorned by a hideous faded hanging of a sort of reddish-brown gimp, of what was called an ecclesiastical pattern of fleurs-de-lys in lozenges. The altar was shabbily draped in a coarse red stuff. An old and wheezy organ in a deal case, with grey metal pipes, stood in one corner ; opposite this was a sort of enclosure, like a loose-box in a stable, which was the reading-desk. The grim and dirty place was cold in winter and hot in summer, and from end to end there was not a single feature or object on which the eye could rest without disgust and aversion.

The boys did not behave badly, but resignedly, and treated the performance as a tedious drill. Two high raised desks of stained deal rose above the throng of heads for the presiding masters.

We must imagine, on an ordinary morning—for there were daily services here, as well as two on Sundays—the boys assembled for service, the last belated stragglers hurrying to their places. The door of the so-called vestry, a lean-to shed, creaks. A small procession of a dozen choir-boys from the town, probationers for the Upper Chapel choir, ill-behaved and at constant feud with the Eton boys, issues out, and goes quickly up the gangway. Behind these follows the chaplain, one of the masters, and at the end, Joynes himself.

He never walked in the centre, but shifted about in a curious way—he always found it difficult to walk slowly—first on one side of the gangway, then on the other. He was always afraid in those latter years of catching cold, and the word “draughty,”



pronounced with a curious flattening of the first syllable, was in his mouth a word of fear. His grizzled hair stuck up stiffly on his forehead, and he used to dart quick, apprehensive glances upwards at the large bare windows, for fear that some ill-advised person had opened a crack to let in air. For the better protection of his own person, he held up one of his surplice sleeves against the right side of his face, and with his left hand he held his cap over the other side of his head, about an inch or two above his hair, to combine reverence and security. He and the chaplain then entered the loose-box, and the service began.

It was the strongest testimony to Joynes's earnestness that he somehow managed to make something beautiful and impressive out of a service held in such surroundings. His kindly glances, the grave and tender tones of his voice, had an unfailing charm; and his sermons were beautiful, though in later years he repeated himself and depended for interest too much on anecdotes snipped from the daily papers. But it was never perfunctorily done; and because it all evidently meant something serious to himself, the boys felt that it was not wholly in vain. It must be said that Warre from the moment that he became Headmaster considered this infamous building a blot on the place, and the present beautiful Lower Chapel, with its stained-glass and fine carved work, is a marvellous contrast to a slatternliness which even forty years ago was treated as a matter of course.

It was traditionally held that when Dr. Balston resigned the Headmastership in 1868, Joynes was sounded as to his willingness to accept the post, and



declined it in a kind of panic of humility. He would have made probably a just and firm ruler ; but no man was a higher Tory in educational matters. He had no theories on the subject of education, no programmes, and knew and cared nothing for what was going on in the educational world and indeed in the world at all. His motto would have been "*Stare super antiquas vias.*" He was lost, I believe, in a vague dream of insecure health and personal piety. I have seldom known an able man with a looser grasp of affairs generally. In talking to him you would have imagined that he never read the papers, except in the search for improving anecdotes. He had no political opinions and knew nothing of literature. He asked a young master once where he was going for his holidays. The reply was, "Rome." Joynes, after a moment of melancholy reverie, shook his head and said, "I shouldn't like that ! I should be afraid of the banditti !" Swinburne was an inmate of Joynes's house, but when I attempted to extract from him some reminiscences of the poet, he seemed to be able to recollect nothing, after some cogitation, except that Swinburne had had red hair. When I mentioned his poetry, he changed the subject decisively, with obvious disapproval. The fact was that he lived the quietest of lives in a quiet and affectionate family circle, and subsisted on local news and a slender stock of old stories. But he had a deep vein of real piety. He had a Sunday Bible-class for men-servants, did a good deal of visiting among the poor, and used to read the Bible, with simple exposition, to bedridden and aged pensioners.

He seldom expressed an opinion at a Masters'



meeting. He disliked all changes in the curriculum, but used to add that so many masters whom he greatly respected had expressed themselves in favour of reform, that he would not press his opinion. French he thought immoral, and science heading straight for atheism.

He married somewhat late in life, his wife being a woman of great sympathy, intelligence, and charm, but so modest and retiring that she took little part in the social life of Eton, though she had many attached and devoted friends. His eldest son was for a time a master at Eton, but he adopted somewhat extreme socialistic and vegetarian views, and was actually arrested as a political agitator in Ireland in the late seventies, where he had gone as a propagandist on a self-sought mission. He was a writer of considerable force and charm, but died prematurely. Another of his sons was a Scholar of King's and Bell Scholar, and adopted a leisurely life with literary proclivities.

One of the characteristic qualities of Old Joynes, in ordinary life, was his determined mirthfulness. It was a matter of duty to him to bear himself with invariable cheerfulness in all companies. He was fond of little confidential jests, which he would deliver privately into one's ear, with a hand upon one's arm or a gentle nudge, survey one's face to watch the effect of his words, and utter a subdued fragment of one of his hearty laughs. He very much disliked hearing any slander or malicious comment, and always followed it up by expressions of his regard for and confidence in the person concerned. He could administer too a grave and direct rebuke. I remember in my early days at Eton, when I had no



doubt rather sacrificed the daily grammar-grind for a more lively and discursive sort of instruction to the fourth-form boys I was engaged in teaching, their performance in the School Trials left much to be desired. Joynes, then my immediate superior, sent for me. I found him in his study, seated on a high stool at a desk, doing nothing in particular, with a row of medicine bottles within easy reach. He greeted me pleasantly, showed me the list, made me a little compliment on my pleasant relations with the boys, and then said very gravely and impressively that these must not be won at the cost of strict and definite teaching. It was so kindly and yet so earnestly delivered, that it did me a great deal of good, and I never made that particular mistake again.

But in spite of this almost roguish cheerfulness of demeanour, I do not think that Joynes had any deep sense of humour. Indeed he was generally rather shocked by it. At an audit dinner at Eton, at which Canon Keate, the son of the famous Headmaster, was present, the talk turned on longevity, and Canon Keate told a story about the famous “ Old Parr,” the centenarian. Joynes’s face fell, and he took on an appearance of pain and concern. However, the conversation proceeded, and presently Joynes brightened up, and excused himself for his temporary gloom by saying with an air of great relief to Canon Keate, “ I thought you were speaking of your father.” That Canon Keate, the most loyal of sons, should have told in public an absurd story about his father, designating him as “ Old Pa,” was inexpressibly ludicrous and preposterous to all but Joynes.



But in any case the old man achieved the distinction of being at all events a great *figure* at Eton, with definite and salient characteristics, and with an atmosphere of his own which differed strangely both in quality and force from the prevailing atmosphere of Eton, and made no concessions to it. He was almost grotesque in some superficial ways, but he was not in the least like anyone else. The essence of such a distinction is probably a simple and pre-occupied unconsciousness of observation ; but the fact remains that the memory lingers half in amusement and half in tenderness over the remembered glimpses of the man ; one can see his face and hear the tones of his voice. He served his generation as he best could. I should not account him a great schoolmaster, or even a notable man, but his was a strong and sincere individuality, and he played a distinct and unforgettable part in the Eton life of his time. With all his queernesses and quaintnesses, there was a conspicuous element of moral beauty about his character, a simplicity, a seriousness, a devotion to spiritual aims, which remains, when all is said and done, as the distinguishing feature of the man.









EDMOND WARRE.

Headmaster of Eton, 1884-1905; Provost, 1909-1918.



## VII

### DR. WARRE

#### I

MR. FLETCHER'S *Life of Dr. Warre*, though it is an extremely interesting book, with abundance of vivid detail and personal atmosphere, brilliantly rendered, does not, I think, quite provide a complete solution of what is after all the central problem of Dr. Warre's work and character. It is undoubtedly true that anyone who came in contact with him, and particularly in the years of his Headmastership, must have instinctively felt that he was in the presence of a very great man ; but the difficulty is to say definitely and explicitly in what that greatness consisted. He was, of course, a man of high ability, wide administrative power, and abundant kindness, but he was not conspicuously gifted in the directions in which it would be natural to suppose that a great Headmaster would be likely to excel. He had a most impressive presence, but neither as a preacher nor as a speaker, nor even as a teacher or a talker, was he pre-eminent. Yet he held the great school over which he presided in the hollow of his hand, and possessed an almost unique influence over the imagination and the loyalty of many generations of Etonians.

This essay is an attempt to summarise the chief stages of Dr. Warre's connection with Eton, and to



provide, or at all events to suggest, a solution, or at least a possible explanation of the indisputable facts. My own belief is that his strength lay in a secret force of character, overwhelming in volume rather than distinct in quality, which was not very obvious at first sight, because it was in no way superficial ; nor did it flow in the accustomed channels so much as underlie all that he did or said. I worked under him for twenty years, and can only say that my consciousness of his real greatness increased upon me every year that I knew him ; and as he was a man who wielded a great influence with a singular modesty, and indeed without any full consciousness of its range and intensity, it is worth while to make a careful analysis of the factors, and to arrive, if possible, at the nature of the quality which enabled him to achieve, almost instinctively, such notable results.

When I went as a small boy to Eton in 1874, the two most forcible and definite personalities among the masters were certainly Edmond Warre and Oscar Browning. Oscar Browning took a very independent line. He made acquaintance with the boys of intellectual and artistic tastes. He had " Sunday evenings," at which first-rate music was rendered by performers brought down from town. His pleasant book-lined library was available at the same time for boys of literary and artistic tastes. You could wander about, take down a volume, ensconce yourself in a corner, perhaps overhear an animated discussion proceeding between boys like J. K. Stephen, Lord Curzon, and Cecil Spring-Rice, and lose yourself in admiration at the depth of erudition and the readiness of argument and rejoinder that were manifested.



Browning himself would bustle in, look at what you were reading, make a criticism or suggestion which would set you thinking, join laughingly in an argument, and go on his way again. It was harmless enough, and decidedly both civilising and stimulating. Then again, as a teacher, Browning was the first master to fill his school-room with designs illustrating Greek and Roman art and architecture; and his teaching substituted a general and attractive culture for exact scholarship. He professed no particular interest in athletics. He was kindly, friendly, and hospitable; and undoubtedly many promising boys of that generation owed their first conception of intellectual life to him; but it was all unconventional and original, perhaps a little revolutionary and Bohemian; and his methods were regarded by Hornby, the then Headmaster, by Warre and other devotees of muscular Christianity, with impatience.

Warre was in many ways the very reverse of this. He had a simple and wholesome code of principle and action. As an Eton boy he had lived a full and vigorous life, enjoying his classical work, a first-rate oar, popular for his modesty and good-humour, blameless and innocent in character, entirely simple and wholesome-minded, not much interested in the complex emotions and contradictions of human nature, but splendidly normal and energetic. Four years of similar successes at Oxford followed; and he came back to Eton, which he adored with an almost lover-like passion, as a Fellow of All Souls', the best oar of his time, and, for a hobby, an intense interest in military history.

When I came to Eton, Warre, I should say, was regarded, both in the place and outside of it, as the



very embodiment of the best sort of Eton traditions—vigorous, kindly, pure-minded, solid, effective. He was Hornby's right-hand, and probably directed his chief's policy far more than Hornby was himself aware. Hornby was himself of the same type as Warre, an excellent scholar and athlete, with even greater social gifts, of which he hardly made full use, and with a mind of wider range and deeper perception. But Hornby had the same kind of mistrust that Warre had, of tastes ultra-intellectual and artistic, and the same suspicion that such pursuits encouraged 'priggishness, sentimentality, and possibly even shaky morality.

Warre's activity was boundless. He had a big boarding-house, and a full pupil-room. He took infinite trouble with his work, he coached the Eight, he captained the Corps, he managed all the swimming arrangements, he took part in every controversy; but he neither schemed nor intrigued—he simply pervaded the place. His health and spirits were inexhaustible. We believed the tradition that he sat up the whole of Tuesday night in every week in order to clear off the correction of his pupils' verse-copies, so as to gain time for his other avocations. He entertained a good deal, and was always full of jokes and Eton stories, which he told with a good deal of dramatic power and humorous imitation.

As a division master, we liked him very much. He was never fussy or irritable, he set very few punishments, and was not very particular about exacting them. There were no surprises or unexpected demands. He had a wonderful memory and a great gift for felicitous quotation. His teaching was very discursive and copious, sound and accurate; but I do not think we found it markedly interesting.



It was almost too diffuse. He had a great belief in note-taking, and we had all of us to be provided with great square notebooks, the paper divided into columns — grammatical, illustrative, philological, subject-matter, and so forth. He would put on a boy to construe, but seldom allowed him to utter more than a sentence or two. Warre could not bear to be kept waiting, and something would start him off; the steady flow of comment and exposition would begin, and continue for the remainder of the lesson. He always taught his division in his own pupil-room, looking out on to paddocks and big elms; and I can recall the sensation of the fresh air of the early summer mornings, and Warre's great resonant voice rising and falling, and with what infinite geniality and contentment he held forth. It was all big, paternal, impressive; but it somehow missed the unexpected quality of great teaching, the sudden surprises, the unsuspected connections, the gleam of wide and far-off horizons.

In 1884 Hornby became Provost. It must be remembered that Warre had been within an ace of being appointed Headmaster when Hornby was selected. It was thought that Warre had not then perhaps quite the standing and experience requisite. He once spoke of this event to me as the great disappointment of his life, but added that he had latterly been very thankful for the time of waiting, and for the experience and patience it had brought him. "I did not understand Eton," he said, "as I understand it now. I should have tried to change too much; a big place that has grown up out of the soil can't be moulded—it can only be directed."

This time, however, there was simply no question.



Warre's appointment was taken for granted. I do not know that the Governing Body even went through the form of inviting candidates to stand. I myself joined the staff in 1885, and saw his early reforms initiated and established. Up to that date Eton had proceeded on the old leisurely lines. The school hours were few and short, and the great bulk of the work fell on the tutors. The result, generally speaking, was that the intelligent and promising boys were admirably taught. They had a good deal of individual teaching, and enough liberty and leisure to do some reading for themselves. But the rank and file were to a certain extent neglected. The curriculum had of course been mainly classical ; mathematics, science, modern languages, receiving a very scanty allotment of time. Warre pulled the whole thing together, and by increasing hours of work, by adding rather elaborate terminal examinations, and by personal inspection of division-teaching, made at once a very marked difference in the whole system, on somewhat military lines.

But I think that the sense of a vigorous personality in the background, scrutinising, criticising, was even more effective. Masters had enjoyed a most unwarrantable degree of independence before Warre's accession ; and teaching which is uninspected and untested is apt, even with well-intentioned teachers, to degenerate into a very sloppy kind of individuality. But Warre seemed to permeate the place. His great rapid stride, his fresh complexion, his loud, resonant voice, his unfailing good-humour, his ample rustling gown and cassock, his demeanour of modest but absolutely unquestioned pre-eminence, all had its effect. There was but one exception. His first



Sixth Form Collegers, following an old College tradition that Warre "favoured" Oppidans and despised Collegers, gave him every sort of trouble, and yet committed no overt act sufficient to justify severe measures. Warre felt it deeply, and even talked of resigning. But after the first year things improved. He began to inspire an admiring awe among the boys. He diminished corporal punishment, the infliction of which was always a trial to him; but he invented in its place a sort of ticket-of-leave system, which entailed upon an offender the necessity of a stainless record for a fixed period, which was immensely successful. There is a delightful story of one of his appearances in inspecting a division. He used to come in unexpectedly, stand beside the master, and ask that the proceedings should go on as usual. This, in my own experience, though Warre always treated me with a paternal indulgence, used to be a very real ordeal. Sometimes he would interpolate a question, and generally ended by conducting the whole affair himself. On this occasion, the boys had been apathetic and ill-prepared. Warre's indignation had slowly risen, and his voice had gathered force and volume. He ended by saying that he would soon pay them another visit, and would expect to find things very different. Finally, he stalked out, and in the hush after the tempest, while the master and the boys regarded each other in an uneasy silence, not unmixed with relief, a big burly boy in the School Eleven was heard to say in an undertone to his neighbour, "Good Lord, how that man does make me sweat!"

But there was no grumbling at his reforms, either among boys or masters. The whole thing was so



kindly, reasonable, and sensible that Warre never went through any of the unpopularity which generally attends a vigorous reformer. This was partly due to his geniality, and partly, too, to the fact that he knew the place so well by instinct that he never made any of the irritating and pedantic changes which arouse the resentful opposition of boys infinitely more than much more far-reaching reforms.

His powers of drill were marvellous. In the 1887 Jubilee, the School marched up to Windsor with torches, performed evolutions, and sang songs in the Castle Court. Warre drew up the entire scheme of action from beginning to end, directed most of the rehearsals, and made a thousand liberty-loving boys carry out a very elaborate programme with perfect orderliness and good-humour. But though, owing to the success of his spectacular handling of the school, the military systematisation of all his arrangements, Warre used to be spoken of as a glorified drill-sergeant, there never was a more ludicrous misunderstanding. He won the obedience of the boys by his justice, his obvious warm-heartedness, his unconscious impressiveness, the complete absence of all pretentious authoritativeness and fussiness, his simplicity and perfect honesty, and his whole-hearted adoration of Eton and Eton's good name.

As a ruler, Warre was above criticism. As Dr. Johnson said of George III, "The King had said it, and it was to be." No boy would ever have dreamed of disputing or questioning his will; I used myself to feel Warre's personal presence irresistible. Sometimes he would talk freely to one in a very simple and straightforward way about schemes and reforms which he was contemplating. Sometimes I disagreed



with him entirely as to their advisability ; but argument was out of the question at the time ; he was so enthusiastic and so good-natured that one could not plead. The only thing to do was to write to him afterwards with due respect, and he always gave due weight to one's representations. But except from masters who were his own contemporaries, he must have received very little criticism of his plans and schemes. And I am bound to add that he did not ask for it or particularly desire it. I remember at a later date that he pressed some rather extravagant reform on the Staff, and when it was discussed at a Masters' meeting and universally condemned, Warre, half-indignantly and half-pathetically, complained that the masters did not back him up. "The fact is," said one of Warre's firmest allies and most caustic of critics, "that Warre's idea of liberty is that everyone should have a vote, and that all the votes should be given in his favour."

On the other hand, his judgment was generally remarkably sound. There was an occasion when there was a large and somewhat rowdy gang of boys near the top of the school, who were inclined to set all authority at defiance, and to resent all coercion, whether from the masters or from the upper boys. One summer evening near the end of the half something very like a riot took place in the street, and all the turbulent elements in the school rushed about, hustling passers-by, hooting and knocking off hats. "Pop," that is to say, the small co-opted club of athletes and prominent boys, in whose hands the discipline of the school actually, though unconstitutionally, lay, acted admirably ; formed a line with linked arms at Windsor Bridge and cleared the street,



sending back all the rioters to their houses. Some masters also made their appearance, and gave what assistance they could. The whole affair was reported to Warre, and he was urged to take summary measures. He asked the masters who had seen the affray to describe it, and I was much amused at the ingenious way in which he minimised almost laughingly all the evidence given, until a list of about a dozen ring-leaders had been reduced to one, when Warre said decisively, "Well, I can't punish one boy for a general outbreak." But the next day he sent for the whole of the Sixth and Fifth forms—some two-thirds of the school—and made them a most moving little speech ; he always knew exactly what arguments would seem sensible to the boys, and he was neither peremptory nor sentimental. At one point of his speech, his anger overcame him, and he shouted like a clap of thunder, "I won't have it!" in a tone which made the rafters ring, and blanched the faces of the assembly. But a moment later he was talking gravely and paternally to six hundred sensible lads, who were only too anxious to regain his goodwill on any terms. And he certainly never had any similar trouble again.

Again when there was an election in Windsor, and the masters suggested all sorts of precautions against disorder, Warre shook his head. He would not restrict bounds, he would not have any patrolling, he would not forbid the boys to go up to Windsor, he wouldn't do anything. He just sent round a very brief notice to say he expected the boys to behave properly and trusted them to do so ; and there was not the smallest trace of misbehaviour.

In all such matters involving tone of feeling and



public conduct, Warre had his finger absolutely on the pulse of the school, and was never mistaken ; and in educational reforms as well, so long as it was a question of creating a certain tradition of method and order in work—that is to say, during the first ten years of his rule—his judgment was remarkably sound.

At the same time Warre had certain difficulties to cope with. In the first place Dr. Hornby, on becoming Provost, became also the *ex-officio* chairman of the Governing Body. It seems an almost ideally difficult and anomalous system to work with, for a Headmaster to find his predecessor placed in supreme authority over his head. It is as though a Prime Minister on retirement became a constitutional monarch, with abundant opportunities of thwarting his successor's designs.

The situation at Eton soon became rather a tense one. Dr. Hornby was a man of great ability, of extraordinarily deft and tactful speech, courteous, dignified, persuasive. He had found Warre a most loyal coadjutor and lieutenant. But Hornby, who had himself been a reformer, and, towards the end of his headmastership, a mild but inert ruler, believed quite conscientiously and honestly that he had established the school on enlightened modern lines, and had gone exactly as far as it was wise to go. The result was that he thought Warre's reforms both unnecessary and pragmatistical, and grew to dislike and mistrust the whole current of Warre's policy. Again and again he persuaded the Governing Body not to accept Warre's proposals. I remember walking with Warre one day, just after the Governing Body had turned down some suggestions which he had



much at heart, and he spoke frankly and almost pathetically about it all. He said that he felt his way blocked at every turn by the Provost. Hornby, he said, had done a great deal for the school, but that, like all institutions, it must continue to develop and expand. He said that it was inconceivable that anyone should believe in the finality of his own reforms. "I am sure," he added with great emotion, "that if I should ever be Provost, I should cordially welcome my successor's plans, and further them to the best of my ability!" And yet history repeated itself, as it generally does; and even in Warre's later days as Headmaster, his efficiency was much impaired by the belief that he had introduced all the changes that were desirable or possible.

Then, too, Warre as the teacher of the Sixth Form was not wholly successful. His scholarship was old-fashioned and curiously esoteric. He became more than ever discursive. He never asked questions, or tested the accuracy or comprehension of boys, his interests were never precisely literary, and he had no artistic conception of style. What he cared about was a certain kind of theology, science in many forms, a military history, and a rather misty philosophy, vague and empirical, neither logical nor profound. Then, too, he had no crispness of expression; he never made an epigram; his sentences were long, confused, verbose, and his terminology was both allusive and obscure. He had a richly-stored mind, but he could not focus or condense his thoughts. When he had something quite definite to say, he could say it forcibly and clearly. But when it came to theorising, or to preaching—though he took great pains with his sermons—the whole thing became



strangely involved and indistinct. His speeches at Masters' meetings were curiously unequal, sometimes homely and inadequate, even ungrammatical, and sometimes enriched by the strangest metaphors. For instance, he said at a meeting that one of the chapel windows had been broken by a stone; he added that though opinions might differ as to the artistic merit of the windows, "we shall all be agreed that it is a pity to disfigure them more than they are already." Again, on an occasion when he was recommending at a Masters' meeting a certain elasticity of methods in teaching, by which he meant, I believe, his own wide-ranging heterogeneous discourses, he said: "We mustn't get fixed and stereotyped—we mustn't be case-hardened and sharded down with beetle-wings." There was some speculation as to what the metaphor was, and it was discovered by someone that he had lately been reading a book about natural history, and had been interested in a passage which related in detail the fact that, under certain circumstances, such as a lack of humidity in the air, cockchafers emerged from the cocoon with their wing-cases adhesively sealed, and that thus being unable to spread their wings they fell an easy prey to passing birds!

Warre was sometimes in a very conversational mood in the evenings. He used in the early days of his Headmastership to give big parties, when he was often in high spirits and bubbling over with old Eton stories and anecdotes which he told with admirable lifelikeness; but later on, as he got older, and his work began to tell on him, the parties got smaller, and were generally composed of a few special intimates. He never on these occasions talked shop,



but as the evening went on, a chance question or a recollection of some book he had been reading would arouse a train of thought—philosophical, ethnological, scientific—and then he indulged in curious soliloquies, in which he seemed almost unaware of his audience, and was like a man indulging in a reverie in solitude ; he would illustrate his meanings by diagrams indicated on the table-cloth, or by an arrangement of forks and dessert knives, to explain, for instance, the divergence of the racial lines of humanity. I used to think these soliloquies at once strangely interesting and uninspiring. He seemed to be almost arranging his own thoughts as he went on, drawing tentative conclusions, arraying facts. I was often too ignorant of the subject even to listen intelligently, and the talk itself was neither crisp nor clear, the words inadequate, the sentences incomplete. But the interest was to observe the range and quality of his mind, his extraordinary memory and his preoccupation with ideas—“moving about in worlds unrealised.” Most interesting of all was when he discoursed semi-philosophically. He used to say that one began life with clear and definite theories about it, and with nothing but wonder for the signs of weariness and pessimism, and the melancholy conclusions drawn about life and its vanity by disillusioned people ; and then as one’s own experience widened, one began to see what a large element of failure and disappointment was mingled with all human hopes and performances.

This mood was, I believe, the outcome of his own experience. Before he became Headmaster, he had moved in a restricted circle, in which he had met with almost unqualified success. His energy



and his good-humour had swept away all obstacles : but then his responsibilities had been local and limited. Yet when he became Headmaster he realised the great vague force of public opinion. He found himself no longer a supremely efficient subordinate, but a man ultimately responsible for the success and good fame of a great national institution, and he discovered that he had critics and detractors as well as friends and allies. When he had to meet external opposition on definite points, he was master of the situation. But a hint from an outside source that Eton was not moving with the times, that the atmosphere was artificial and privileged, that the standard of morality in the school was low, that the curriculum was illiberal, gave him almost undue anxiety. He disliked publicity ; he seldom accepted outside engagements ; he abominated newspaper criticism ; it was not that he was timid so much as uncertain how much serious criticism such comments represented.

These were his main difficulties during the first ten years of his Headmastership ; and they did not amount to very much. He ruled with diligence ; no one questioned the fact that he had carried out a useful scheme of reform and that the school, without losing any of its traditional liberty, was orderly, contented, well-disciplined, and sensible. The boys admired his vigour and respected his straightforwardness ; there was not a trace of anything petty or suspicious or tyrannical about him. He carried the Staff with him and the Governing Body trusted him to the uttermost, though they did not always follow his lead.

One of the strongest of Warre's minor characteristics was his great love of bricks and mortar. He



built a large and indubitably ugly boarding-house, weak in colour and material, as well as feeble in design, which had little dignity or even particular convenience. He erected in hot haste a large school of mechanics, and a drill-hall of strangely starved aspect, which were a great disfigurement to the quiet rural view of Eton, screened by lofty elms, from the railway. When he became Headmaster he destroyed the old Rotunda, a quaint little octagonal theatre built in the forties for musical and other performances, and on its site caused to be erected the Queen's Schools and Lower Chapel. The entrance to the schools has much dignity, but the exterior beauty of the chapel is somewhat sacrificed to its fine interior. He was also mainly responsible for the building of the fine church at Hackney Wick for the Eton Mission. Besides, two new boarding-houses of great size were built during his sway, and several other houses added to and modified; lastly, he carried through the building of the great Memorial Hall and Octagon Library in memory of Etonians who fell in the Boer War, which have a good deal of character. But in this matter it is doubtful, I think, whether many of those who subscribed did not regard it more as a tribute to Warre's influence, and a visible memorial of his own services to Eton than anything else. Neither was Warre himself very precise as to the scope of the Memorial. In one of the first speeches he made to the Staff on the subject, he sketched a somewhat vague programme. What he wanted was, he said, to get a big room built without any *arrière pensée* whatever. At a later date he said that he continually felt the need of a hall where the whole school could assemble—though as a matter



of fact the school had often assembled quite effectively in the open air, and had found the Headmaster's speeches even more than audible. At another time he dwelt more on the necessity of a worthy memorial. As one of his oldest friends on the Staff said rather caustically, "Warre tells us that there are a thousand and one reasons for building a great hall. I wish he would leave the thousand alone, and tell us plainly what the one is!"

As far as the actual beauty and dignity of the buildings which he added to Eton went, they do not bear the impress of personal taste. I do not think he had any natural artistic criterion of beauty: the fittings, for instance, of his own house in the Cloisters, which consisted of no less than four of the bygone Fellows' residences thrown together, had little grace of style, while they sacrificed the sense of antiquity. I think he probably felt rather a contempt for æsthetic considerations, and regarded the indulgence of them as an affectation. All he required was that a building should be sound, solid, and, if possible, big. The details he left to architects and critics; and it is an apt illustration of the fact that his strength lay in creative force rather than in critical discrimination.

## II

In 1896 Warre had a bad attack of influenza, and was forced for a time to take a holiday. Of course, he had always dangerously overtaxed his strength, and now he became not exactly a valetudinarian, but anxious about his health. He suffered from sleeplessness, and symptoms suggesting a depletion of nervous reserves. He gave up a good deal of his



teaching; he ceased to go into early school; he seldom called absence. But he was far too enthusiastic and conscientious a man to become inert or indifferent—indeed it might have perhaps been better if he had become simply quiescent, and allowed the big machine which he had started to run smoothly as it was running. But his mind was active and energetic; he had more time to consider problems and criticism, and he had to a great extent parted with the buoyant optimism which had carried him so easily over rough waters. At the same time he rather lost touch with his staff, and saw them less. The consequence was that he produced a good many hasty schemes of reform, and projects of a somewhat fanciful kind, such as a plan which he propounded for abandoning the ordinary curriculum for a week in the middle of every term, and substituting for it lectures and teaching on modern history and geography. The idea was in itself a good one, for the weakness of the classical curriculum is that it does not bring boys in touch with the modern progress of the world, the social tendencies, the great fruitful ideas which underlie progress, the vivid personalities of leaders and reformers, so that many boys are brought up in real ignorance of modern social conditions, and only assimilate the crude prejudices and misrepresentations of scantily-informed home circles. There are many boys, for instance, whose only idea of a newspaper is that it is a thing which contains athletic news and murder trials. One cannot expect, of course, that boys should have an exhaustive knowledge of current political and social topics, but nothing can excuse the fact that in their most impressible years school education keeps them so



ignorant of the world as it is, and allows the foundations of ineradicable prejudices to be laid.

But Warre overlooked the fact that a conscientious staff of masters, working for years on definite classical lines, and if anything overburdened by the correction of exercises, are very ill-equipped to lecture for a week on end on current history and geography ; it would have entailed upon them a quite impossible amount of preparation, and the result was that the Staff objected respectfully, but firmly, to what was really an impracticable plan.

Another suggestion was to form, in the interests of order and morality, a small monitorial committee in each house. As a matter of fact, most efficient boarding-house masters no doubt talk more or less freely about matters which seriously concern the welfare of the house to one or two of the older boys whom they can entirely trust, and who themselves feel a responsibility for keeping the tone good and wholesome ; but to create what would have been considered by the boys to have been a sort of vigilance committee would have introduced into the system an ugly suspicion of espionage ; and if the boys in question had been themselves on the wrong side in moral matters, would have vitiated the very precautions which it was the object of the scheme to secure. This again was almost indignantly criticised by the Staff, and the project reluctantly abandoned.

Another instance of the same kind occurs to me ; but this was a case where the process was reversed, and the suggestion pressed upon Warre by the Staff, but only after long delay and much protest accepted. The old system of promotion up the school was by "removes," as they were called—that is to say, a



section of the school which competed among themselves for places. But in arranging these removes into divisions, it often happened that the tail end of one remove would be placed in a division with the top boys of the next remove. That is to say, a master would have a division composed of some fifteen boys who had only just contrived to pass the examination, boys perhaps with the scantiest knowledge of the class, to whom a short passage of Latin and Greek bristled with difficulties, who could only write the very simplest Latin prose, and who required the slowest and most patient teaching to understand the smallest difficulty. Then there would be fifteen boys from the top of the next remove, full of intelligence, quick to grasp the meaning of sentences, able to learn by heart in a quarter of an hour more than one of the slower boys could master in an hour. The situation was an impossible one. If one set a piece of Latin prose such as the slower boys could manage in an hour, the cleverer boys could do it in ten minutes; while if one set a hard piece, which the cleverer boys could do fairly well in an hour, the slower boys could not do it at all. The only thing to do was to turn one's division into two sets, and teach them alternately, finding some occupation for the clever boys while one was slowly drilling elementary work into the others.

The Staff asked that the boys should be arranged so that the divisions should be homogeneous. But Warre, who was often at the mercy of a metaphor, said that he thought it was a good thing to have "light and shade" in a division. He went on to say that he thought it was good for the cleverer boys to hear the others being drilled in elementary



work, so that they might not be tempted to forget the groundwork; and that the slower boys were stimulated by hearing the cleverer boys deal with a lesson in a more literary and intellectual fashion. He overlooked the fact that when the duller boys were being drilled in grammar, the cleverer boys did not listen; and that while the cleverer boys were disporting themselves in intellectual regions, the duller boys had no idea what was going on! But it took, literally, years to induce Warre to accept this simple reform, which was unanimously desired by the Staff without a single exception.

This perpetual conflict over educational methods produced some friction. Warre was by that time a man whose own work was very light. He taught little, he inspected divisions more and more rarely. A good many small matters were referred to him, which he decided with admirable promptitude. But it is clear that he did not realise that his reforms had entailed a good deal of extra work on the Staff—it was a decidedly hard life, the work of a housemaster with a division and a full set of pupils—and masters began to feel that in making the suggestions of reform, he seldom considered the amount of work that the changes might add to the duties of men who were already over-worked. But it did not cause any disaffection or lack of loyalty. The masters continued to administer the system which Warre had created, and which was working admirably, and in matters affecting the general government of the school he was unquestioningly deferred to and obeyed.

It was at this time that I discovered the fact about Warre which had hitherto escaped me. The more remote that he became, the less that he appeared,



the more boys there were in the school who never came in contact with him, so much the more did his prestige and authority grow among the boys. He became like Olympian Jove dwelling in clouds and darkness, and not even needing to remind his followers, except by a very occasional and innocuous thunderpeal, that the lightnings were still in his grasp. Two incidents occur to me. He conceived the idea that the debates in Pop, which was ostensibly a debating club, were not sufficiently intellectual in quality—and at that time they had become formal, if not farcical. He accordingly sent for Pop and harangued them on the subject, saying that he wished there to be an inclusion of elements of a more definitely official and intellectual kind. He produced an admirable impression on the boys; they thought him kind, considerate, sensible, and paternal. They did exactly what he wanted, and he attended a debate, anxiously rehearsed beforehand, and made them a delightful speech. Yet if he had attempted this on his accession, it would have been much resented.

Again, during the Boer War, there was a good deal of irreverent and disorderly singing in chapel. I do not remember how this arose; perhaps it was that the Provost's preferences in hymns were for the mildest, briefest, and most unemotional specimens. But the boys began to sing favourite verses very loud, to prolong the final cadences, and maintain an absolute silence in the less attractive portions. It was silly and unseemly, but not deliberately mutinous. Warre suddenly ordered the boys in the eastern part of the chapel, whence this emanated, to remain in their places after a service. He stalked up slowly to the altar-steps, his shoulders up, as was always



the case if there was trouble brewing, his face sternly set, and made a most moving speech. He pointed out how extraordinarily unfeeling and unseemly it was for such a manifestation to occur at a time when England was so full of sorrow and anxiety. He hoped and believed that it was mere thoughtlessness, but he had felt ashamed of the behaviour of the school for the first time since he had been Headmaster. It distressed him to say this, and he trusted he would never have to say or think such a thing again—and then after a moment's silence, looking round at the boys, he added, "and may God forgive us all." It was a perfect utterance in its dignity and simplicity, neither indignant nor sentimental, and it had an extraordinary effect upon the boys, because he had not treated the affair as a moral delinquency or an infraction of discipline, but just as a distressing lapse of good feeling and consideration, in a place which ought to have been saved by its traditions from anything of the kind. There was not a single boy there who, after that speech, would either have defended their behaviour, or even treated it as a joke. It had been bad form, and they were ashamed of it. It did not even silence the chapel singing; the services just returned to their accustomed manner.

I think that this incident, more than anything which ever happened at Eton, revealed to me the secret of Warre's success. He did not owe his astonishing influence to any great intellectual power. Neither as preacher nor speaker nor teacher did he make any particular impression. It is doubtful if by this time many of the boys knew that he had ever been an athlete, for he seldom looked on at a race or a match, and never appeared at Henley or Lord's.



He did not even take much part in the affairs of the Corps which he had founded. The boys knew nothing of his powers of administration, and were probably quite unaware that he had initiated any educational reforms. With many of the boys he never came into personal contact at all. I remember an active-minded and intelligent boy, son of a prominent statesman, saying to me about this time on his last evening at Eton, "It may be all right, sir, and I think a lot of the Head, but I don't think I ought to have gone through Eton without ever having had a word with him for good or evil, till he said good-bye to me to-day."

The boys were no doubt impressed by the Headmaster's singularly stately appearance, the look of enormous physical strength, his great stride, his firmly planted feet, his fresh complexion, his kindly and masterful air. But this was not enough; and I am sure, though it is hard to put into words, that Warre's almost preternatural effect was produced by some inner greatness, not so much of mind or even of heart, though he was an intensely warm-hearted and kindly man, as of the inner subconscious self which plays so much larger a part in our lives than we have till quite lately known. This was not mere energy, nor even fearlessness—he was in some ways an anxious-minded and even timid man—nor was it patience or deliberateness, for he was often too much in a hurry; it was simply a strong and forceful current of personality, which permeated the whole place with its steady flow. I do not think that Warre was ever influenced by anyone. He had deep affections; he was the best of husbands and fathers, and he had innumerable friends; but I doubt if anyone ever



changed or modified his opinions or purposes. He sometimes abandoned a scheme in the face of opposition ; but he forged steadily ahead, self-directed and self-impelled. He had every quality that goes to make up what we mean by the word gentleman—strength, bravery, courtesy, modesty, stainless honour, perfect honesty, entire innocence of mind. He never did a mean thing, and only reluctantly a severe thing. He had some deep-seated prejudices, a great mistrust of the intellectual and artistic point of view. He abominated vulgarity and he loathed impurity. But what made all this so effective was the deep inner strength of which I speak, no self-conscious sense of righteousness, but an unconscious sense of rightness, which made him, without any vanity or jealous scheming, or any desire to create an impression, a natural ruler and leader of men.

A word may be said about the holiday house which for many years gave him a beloved retreat from the cares of public life. Baron's Down at Dulverton was a big, shabby, comfortable old hunting-lodge, standing high above a river valley, with some farm-land and gardens attached, and with a good deal of woodland and steep copse all about. The steep and narrow valleys wound up into Exmoor, and Haddon Hill with its breezy tracts of heather was not far away. Down below, by the stream, were the ruins of a Priory, and the deep-cut climbing and winding lanes led to remote villages, where life was still lived on primitive lines. Farmer Warre, as he liked to describe himself, was happily and enthusiastically at home there in his native county. He liked nothing better than to tramp about his farm, talk to the shepherd, gossip with the labourers, and hear the news of the country-



side. Sometimes he would join in a shooting-party—he had the shooting of some moorland woods where the old English pheasants bred, and flew so swiftly, high over the tree-tops, that it took very skilful shooting to bring them down ; but it was the country and the open air that he loved more than any considerations of sport.

I stayed there with him more than once. He was late in going to bed, but the first to rise ; and at an early hour one could hear him tramping about, calling his boys—and they all sat down together to read a few verses of the Greek Testament before breakfast. Family prayers followed, read by Warre faster than I have ever heard prayers read, and yet with a real reverence. At meals he was full of talk and local stories, told in admirable Somersetshire dialect—such as how when he took his D.D., he was sent for in haste by a neighbouring farmer to see the Missus and prescribe for her—or he would improvise fanciful conversations that he had overheard between animals, with extraordinary humour and perception. In the morning he sate at his work and letters, enveloped in a rug. But in the afternoons he would walk up and down among the copse-paths. His terrier, a small, unscrupulous, dejected-looking creature, was the most disobedient dog I have ever seen, and was for ever darting off after rabbits in the undergrowth, while Warre made the woodlands ring with the dog's name, in a tone that would have made an Eton boy faint with terror ; and when the truant chose to return, Warre would chide him with an uplifted forefinger in the most considerate fashion. Then perhaps he would take one to the garden—he was a very considerable botanist—and show his experiments and



successes ; and all about his sturdy friendly boys, adoring their father, went to and fro, and Mrs. Warre made her gentle and kindly comments—a circle of wonderful peace, contentment, and unanimity. In the evening, sitting in his big armchair—Great Snorum, as he called it—with his smoking-cap and rough dressing-gown, he would discourse more at large about men and things, and his plans and hopes for Eton. But even so his prejudices and anxieties took on a gentler and more hopeful tinge at Baron's Down, and I feel no doubt that the holiday times at Baron's Down were the happiest of his life.

But the end of the chapter was near at hand. He decided to leave Eton in 1905. His last sermon in the chapel was preached on the text, "I see that all things come to an end ; but Thy commandment is exceeding broad." He might have made it into a solemn and moving farewell ; but he said little of himself, with characteristic modesty. He had done his work to the best of his ability ; the school had prospered and flourished under him, and had gained a prestige which it had never known before. But he had no thought of self-glorification. The work was done, and it was for others to estimate it, and I believe that he hardly knew how pervading an influence his had been. He moved to a comfortable house in beautiful country, Finchampstead Rectory, on the Ridges near Wellington College, above the Hampshire plain where Eversley lies. I believe that while he was here he was offered the Deanery of Exeter, but he had little knowledge or interest in things definitely ecclesiastical. And then in 1909, after a brief interval, he was recalled to the Provostship of Eton, which made him very happy.



At first he enjoyed the place and the work, and took a great interest in the deliberations of the Governing Body. But though he was not yet an old man, and had still a youthful air, there crept over him a sort of slow paralysis, which suspended his activities one by one, till he became almost bedridden. On this I will not dwell. I will merely describe my last interview with him in the early days of the war. I found him in bed, in a room high up in the Provost's Lodge, looking out over the garden. He could neither read nor write ; he was very tremulous, and his voice was so low that at first I could hardly distinguish what he said. But he asked many questions, seemed to know all about my doings and interests, and spoke both humorously and decisively about some of our friends. All at once I recognised that behind the failing body and the whispered utterance was the friend I had known so long, entirely unchanged, his mind and perceptions as clear as ever, neither weakened nor lethargic, but direct, simple, honest, and with an added patience and tenderness that gave him a dignity and a beauty all his own. He said not a word about himself or his disabilities, gave me his blessing with uplifted hand, and we parted for ever. His good nurse, who had come to fetch me away, seeing that I was very much affected, said to me, " You mustn't go away thinking that the Provost is unhappy because he is so helpless. He takes a great interest in all that goes on, and he lies there just thinking of the old times—he doesn't think about himself or pity himself—and he is spared the worst side of such an illness."

I had gone feeling that I was to see the darkest and saddest sort of tragedy—a great man of singular



vigour and energy imprisoned in a body broken down by dangerous toil, perhaps hating his bondage, and facing the tardy coming of death with bravery born of pride. But it was not so ; it was a tranquil and unaffected serenity, not rebellious or stoical, but finding strength in quiet submission to the impenetrable decree of God. Not many a man can have had so little to reproach himself with, so little to be ashamed of. Yet it was neither a meek submissiveness, nor a childlike trust. It was rather as the old text says : " Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him as unto a faithful Creator."



## VIII

### OSCAR BROWNING

#### I

OSCAR BROWNING was a man of whom it may fairly be said that if his deeds and words were truly and literally reported, the picture would be held to be incredible. It is true that a considerable amount of legend grew up round him, but none of the aptest inventions about him were so extraordinary as the amazing reality. He had a touch of genius, a great deal of talent, industry, persistence, and force of character. He was immensely generous and liberal, and of an overflowing kindliness; he had an insatiable thirst for experience and an unfailing zest for life. But side by side with these fine qualities he had many and grave faults. He was indiscreet, unreliable, egotistical, extravagant, resentful; he was combative and quarrelsome, and an unscrupulous adversary. He scarified his opponents in public and in private; he was fearless but not fair-minded; he could be an intolerable companion; he pursued distinction and distinguished persons with unashamed earnestness. He had indeed many of the qualities of greatness, but was far from being a great man. Yet he compelled an astonished sort of admiration, and in certain moods he was undoubtedly lovable. Could a more singular compound be invented?





*Elliott & Fry.*

OSCAR BROWNING.

Circa 1885.







## II

I knew him first in 1874 when I was a small Eton Colleger, and he a housemaster of some fourteen years' standing. He was then a very marked figure. He took no interest whatever in athletics, and it must be admitted that he was decidedly neglectful of his prescribed work. There was a little story current about him, which we firmly believed, and I cannot go so far as to say that it is obviously untrue. He came into school one day, having just received by post a volume which he much desired to read, on Swedish metaphysics, we used to say. He said to his Division that he was going to vary the order of the proceedings, and not have the usual construing lesson, but that all the boys should translate the lesson on paper, so that he could see exactly how carefully it had been learned. The boys set to work; Oscar Browning opened his book, after taking occasion to say that the subject of it was one which most people would find it impossible to comprehend; when the hour struck, he collected the boys' papers, and threw the whole into the waste-paper-basket before their eyes.

At the same time he could be a lively, stimulating, and inspiring teacher, and a good disciplinarian. But his main work at Eton was done unofficially. He had a big boarding-house and was much liked by his boys. He was almost the first master at Eton who tried to run his house on home lines rather than on barrack-room lines. He had a large staff of servants, the food was excellent, and he studied the comfort of the boys in all respects. Moreover, he took a great personal interest in his pupils, especially if they showed any intellectual promise



or curiosity. But beside this he entertained profusely. He constantly had boys to breakfast and tea. On Sundays he used to have a pianist or even a string quartette down from London and held a Sunday evening reception, to which he invited his colleagues, their wives and children, and many boys from other houses. My uncle, Henry Sidgwick, was a great friend of O. B.'s; consequently when I came to Eton in 1874, O. B. asked me to breakfast frequently, and made me free of his house. The Sunday evening was a very civilised affair, and much valued by boys of artistic and literary tastes. The music was in the drawing-room, and on the other side of the lobby, O. B.'s fine and comfortable library was thrown open. I, a boy of twelve, used to ensconce myself in a big chair, choose a book, and survey the scene. One would see boys like Lord Curzon, J. K. Stephen, the present Lord Portsmouth, and Alfred Lyttelton conducting a political or literary argument with much force and frankness. Cecil Spring-Rice or George Wyndham would sit absorbed in a book, O. B., then a small, light-stepping, bustling figure, with a handsome profile and curly black locks, would flit about, join laughingly in an argument, be appealed to by another boy for a book on a particular subject, utter oracles. He would take the volume out of one's hands, ask one a question about it, indicate another book for future reading. His remarks were suggestive and stimulating—knowledge under such illumination seemed a fine thing to aim at. He was always gay and cheerful, and one felt the charm of a direct personal relation.

I have no hesitation in saying that this was a very fruitful and valuable piece of work. Many boys of



that date owe their intellectual interests to O. B. The germ of such tastes is not a very robust one, and is found in impressionable boys, in whom its vitality is easily extinguished, if the prevailing tone of the institution to which they belong is robustly, cheerfully, and decisively contemptuous of the finer nuances.

There were two or three masters who followed more or less in the wake of O. B. and carried on his work ; but they had not his audacity, or his ready eloquence—for O. B. was never unduly restrained by lack of knowledge from extemporising an apparently considered opinion—nor perhaps had they quite his emotional sympathy with youth.

But the general current of Eton opinion was against these vagaries ; the mixed gathering was thought to be unconventional, indiscreet, revolutionary, endangering due subordination ; it was suggested that such processes might lead to priggishness, effeminacy, even to impatience of moral restraint. Warre, then a very successful, and in his own way influential, housemaster, mistrusted the whole business. Hornby, then Headmaster, tried to suppress it. O. B. was snubbed and thwarted in a way which would have been unbearable to a sensitive man ; but O. B. was never inertly sensitive ; he was combative ; he “ drank delight of battle with his peers,” and he greatly preferred opposition and adverse criticism to tolerance and silence.

At this juncture he committed a technical blunder. He took one pupil more than he was entitled to take. Hornby, after much angry and indecorous recrimination on Browning’s part, dismissed him. It was a tyrannical and short-sighted act. But it had a



disastrous effect on O. B.'s fortunes. He thought of bringing an action, but was restrained from doing so by the advice of Lord Brabourne and Mr. Justice Stephen. He could hardly have been compulsorily reinstated; but his dismissal on grounds of such extreme tenuity—the offence would have been condoned in the case of any other master—left an impression that there must have been something much more serious in the background, and this overshadowed O. B. more or less for the rest of his life.

### III

He still held a life-Fellowship at King's, and he transferred his goods thither. He had spent his large income profusely and extravagantly, and was considerably in debt. But his friends—he always had devoted friends, such as Henry Sidgwick and Jebb—arranged matters. At King's he was made a History lecturer, and for a good many years he was a considerable intellectual force, both at King's and in the University. He knew a great deal of history in a loose way. He was a skimmer of many books rather than a student of a few; but his memory was good, and his imagination bridged gaps easily. He was a very fair lecturer, and used to hold symposia for historical discussion; his real gift was that of illuminating a subject in a highly suggestive way, for he was essentially a cultivated man, with his knowledge ready to his hand; and his words seemed to open up vistas of attractive knowledge and thought. Certainly men like J. K. Stephen owed much to him, though in reality they owed as much or more to George Prothero, who was his colleague at King's. Prothero was a very sound and exact student, but



without the inspiriting touch that O. B. had. But Prothero being an essentially modest man, while O. B. proclaimed himself in all companies as the founder and pioneer of Cambridge history, the result was that O. B. got most of the credit, which he only partially deserved. O. B. never professed to train strict historical students—and indeed his inaccuracy and his slapdash generalisations would have made this impossible—but his idea was to train young men for public life by the application of a diffused sort of culture, based, not very securely, on historical study, somewhat after the fashion of the Athenian Sophists. As a Sophist, indeed, he was markedly successful; in fact, though the first duty of an historical school is probably to train historical students, it is to be regretted that O. B.'s function was not more definitely continued. It is easy to criticise it scornfully, and to make damaging references to sciolism and fluid culture; but the fact remains that a good many men of supple intelligence pass through a University who are well worth cultivating, though they could never be made into serious and technical students.

It was at this time, in 1881, that I came to King's as a Classical Scholar, and was brought a good deal into contact with O. B. It is hard to say what exactly we thought about him. I suppose that the History men took him more or less seriously, though his inaccuracy was notorious, and the shallows over which he sailed, gaily vociferating, were patent. He treated me with much kindness, being an old friend of my family. I liked him, found his talk sometimes interesting, more often tedious—for by that time he had acquired the habit of pursuing his



own line of thought without much reference to his hearer. He often spoke acrimoniously and derisively of his colleagues; he ventilated lengthy grievances. I cannot say that we respected him; and to most of us he was a gigantic joke. He was very much in evidence; he was almost always in early chapel at 8 o'clock, and often asked men in to informal meals. In the evening he was generally in Hall.

On Sunday evening he threw his rooms open and had a little music. But he had somewhat lost his old *art de salon*. He was genial, but with a certain uneasiness, and instead of talking to his guests about themselves, he talked to them about himself. Here, on Sunday evenings, he used to trundle bulkily about among his assembled guests, distributing endearments, slapping acquaintances on the back; serving out gossip with a loud, rather faltering laugh; the intention obviously of the kindest, but all a little vitiated by the fact that he could no longer acquire information through the medium of speech; he could only soliloquise. We used to say that he gave the impression of always wishing he were doing something else. He had very little natural humour. He had an epigrammatic turn, and occasionally told stories which he had reason to believe were amusing. But I do not remember ever having seen him heartily amused. His laughter was tentative, and his witticisms were adroit adaptations, not implying any deep perception of the rich absurdities of life. His big rooms, on the second floor of the front court, were furnished with a certain magnificence, lined with books, and wearing a cultured, cosmopolitan air.

Most of the current stories about him turned on his unabashed pursuit of notabilities. This was not what



is commonly called snobbishness, by any means. It was more an attempt to sustain his self-esteem by feeling that he was very much in the swim. The kind of story that was in circulation was that an undergraduate found him in his rooms packing up for a trip to the Continent, and issuing directions to a gyp in the inner room. "Yes, I am going abroad. I am going to Lucca. I believe there is a Grand Duke there?" "I am afraid I don't know." "Yes, I am sure there is. Hopkins!" (to the gyp) "pack my second-best dress coat." There lay on his table a scrap-book to which he often drew attention; it contained calling-cards of eminent persons, invitations to dinner from people of rank, and among other singular relics, a letter to himself from Robert Browning in terms of unmeasured severity, inveighing against him for opening a letter marked "Private" and addressed to the poet, and sending it on with comments upon its contents. J. K. Stephen was fond of exercising his wit upon O. B. It was he who said that the derivation of "microbe," was *μικρός*, "little," and O. B. It was characteristic of O. B. that jokes of this nature gave him nothing but pleasure. He repeated it to everyone he met. He was always an enthusiastic attendant of undergraduate assemblies, and at the so-called "Comby," which was a kind of smoking-concert, O. B. could be persuaded to sing the Neapolitan boating-song, indescribably ludicrous as a piece of half-hearted buffoonery; satirical and ribald rhymes were sung about him in his presence on these occasions; and these manifestations he valued. He was popular, but mainly in the sense that he was a source of much innocent gaiety.



He was at this time certainly an industrious man. He generally had a young protégé or two as his secretaries, to whom he dictated his books and his letters; but his books were seldom serious contributions to literature; they were written in a readable style, but they were scrappy and inexact. I have always thought they were more devices to exercise a restless brain than anything else, and perhaps undertaken to earn a little money, while his correspondence was neither intimate nor technical, but simply the overflowing of complacent or resentful egotism.

He had now become bald and was growing very stout. He rolled in his gait; if one walked with him, he frequently butted against one, and seemed consumed by a desire to tread on his companion's toes. He dressed generally in black, with a red silk handkerchief garishly displayed. He was constantly caricatured, and his fondness for bathing in public gave youthful artists opportunities for studies in the nude of which full advantage was taken. Speaking generally, I should say that at this date there was a certain Falstaffian quality about him, with this difference, that his humour was not very remarkable, and that he was *au fond* courageous. He never brooked contradiction, he never refrained from vigorous personalities, and he fought to the last gasp for any smallest detail on which he had set his mind.

It must, however, be admitted that between the ages of forty to fifty he did a great deal of pioneer work in history, started and maintained a strong historical school in King's, and by the Political Society which he set on foot and constantly attended, he contrived to stimulate, though hardly to influence,



a good many intelligent young men, for he never made disciples.

## IV

Twenty years later I returned to Cambridge, and soon became aware that a considerable change had passed over O. B. He was as active as ever. He had added to his other occupations the Principalship of the Cambridge Training College for teachers, and in this capacity he did, I believe, his best work. He took a lively personal interest in the young men; he saw them constantly, and, I have reason to know, showed great liberality and kindness in assisting them. On the other hand, he gave a great deal of trouble to the Syndicate which controlled the Training College. He was unbusinesslike, he disobeyed explicit directions, he acted on his own responsibility, and was extremely indignant if he was criticised. In his own College he had become, it must be frankly confessed, an impossible colleague. He talked incessantly, aired his grievances, contemned his brother-Fellows, engineered opposition, criticised harshly, argued provocatively. Moreover his lecturing had become slipshod and out of date, and his teaching perfunctory. His theory of a history school as a training for public life had won little acceptance. Meanwhile his pursuit of publicity had become almost a morbid prepossession. He had thrice unsuccessfully stood for Parliament, and his ardour in the pursuit of celebrities was unabated. There is an amusing anecdote of how one of his colleagues had been sent for to Windsor for a Royal interview, and related his experiences in Hall in the evening. O. B. listened with painful interest and undisguised jealousy, crumbling his bread with both hands. At the end he asked



his colleague by which of the many portals he had entered the Castle. The other described the approach. O. B. sank back in his seat with a look of infinite relief, and said in triumphant tones, " Ah, that was the servants' entrance ! "

He was still the subject of innumerable anecdotes. But it was clear that by the men who had, in whatever capacity, to work with him, he was regarded with impatience and irritation. I saw a good deal of him first and last, but the interviews had lost much of their old charm. He poured out the secret history of innumerable squabbles, in the minutest details. He regarded himself as the victim of endless intrigues. It was impossible to interrupt him, or to divert his mind. I remember once taking an old friend and former colleague of his to see him. They had been very intimate in earlier days, but had not met for many years. Unfortunately O. B. had just received the proof of a magazine article of his own, and could think of nothing else. The editor had made some trifling changes, and O. B. occupied the entire hour of our visit by reading aloud the article and the suggested alterations, and speaking of the editor, a man of high reputation, with the utmost bitterness and contempt. He once said to me at this time that there were three things which earned a man unpopularity and mistrust at Cambridge : (1) the possession of a literary style, (2) the manifestation of any interest in undergraduates, (3) the maintenance of any touch with the outside world.

But in these later years it cannot be said that O. B. had any real hold on the outside world. He had a few pupils who had risen to high positions, such as Lord Curzon, Lord Latimer, and Mr. Gerald



Balfour, who treated him with loyal consideration. But his published memoirs show, as was acutely pointed out by a reviewer, that O. B. had met more distinguished people *once* than any other living man ; the acquaintance had in few cases been pursued.

It was all a rather distressing business. Here was a man of great talents, headlong industry, wide experience, genuine enthusiasm, who had spent fifteen years at Eton and thirty at Cambridge, who was a notorious figure, indeed, through his singular appearance, his palpable weaknesses, his undaunted push, but who had won no serious reputation, attained to no solid honours, made no adherents. He could not be despised—he was far too self-assertive for that—and he had undoubtedly won the regard and gratitude of many humbler friends. But he was not far from being a tragic failure : his appearance was grotesque and portentous, his reputation was vaguely astray ; he enjoyed no real esteem or honour ; and all his colleagues in any practical enterprise were anxiously on the look-out for any opportunity of terminating his connection with its administration.

And yet if one was brought into contact with him, one became instantly aware that one was in the presence of an absolutely undaunted spirit. His zest for life was entirely unabated. He revelled in his work ; all the morning he poured out floods of ill-considered and ill-remembered generalisations, and dictated animated, self-centred, unnecessary letters. He interviewed his Training College men, he scuffled through his teaching, he did not shrink from meeting declared opponents whom a sensitive man would have shunned. He poured out his



grievances in Hall, he drove reluctant confidants frantic in his rooms. Occasionally, when he could be induced to speak of old times, his reminiscences were interesting. But I remember evenings when he came to my house for a *tête-à-tête* dinner, with bags and bundles of papers—the ashes of extinct controversies—and for hours, an extinguished cigar between his lips, demonstrated his own prescience and sagacity, and the malignity and low-mindedness of everyone else concerned.

Eventually it was intimated to him that he must resign the Principalship of the Training College, the real reason being that he would hold no communication with and regard no instructions that came from the Board of Education. He accepted a pension; and later on, when, in the course of the war, the fund from which it was paid had ceased to exist, he intimated that if it were not paid he would at once bring an action against the University. He fixed upon one of his opponents, a high-minded and courteous man, as the prime mover in the affair, said and wrote that he had rendered himself unfit for the society of gentlemen, and attributed his opposition, which was based upon public-spirited grounds, to his desire to obtain a certain post, for which O. B. regarded himself as uniquely qualified.

It was difficult at the time to hold any coherent discourse with him, because he interspersed his diatribes against his critics with elaborate and complacent panegyrics of himself, his tact, his persistence, his enlightened views, his instinctive knowledge of all the vital currents of national life. It might have been possible to console him, if he had manifested any depression, by dwelling on his un-



doubted zeal and liberality in the conduct of the Training College. But he showed no sign of either discouragement or depression. He stated explicitly that his own theories were faultless, that his administration had been impeccable, that his tact and patience had been unfailing. He not only did not admit that he might in some respects have earned criticism ; he maintained that he was the victim of envy and detraction, and that he had been expelled from his post owing to the base ambitions of colleagues, and to the hatred aroused by the sight of any work faultlessly and perfectly performed.

Yet nearly two years after the whole matter had been completed and every claim settled, he presented to the Syndicate an immense unpaid bill for cab hire, extending over a period of years ; and in answer to remonstrances, only triumphantly said, " They could hardly have expected me to *walk* ? "

## V

He left Cambridge and sold his library. I used to meet him at the Athenæum from time to time, and we kept up a fairly frequent correspondence. He always spoke of Cambridge as a place the dust of which he had shaken from off his feet, and of himself as the victim of furtive personal intrigues ; but to speak with entire frankness and honesty, I never could detect in him the least trace of suspicion that he was himself responsible for any of his misfortunes. He never spoke of his reputation as damaged, or his career as injured by his departure from Cambridge, nor did he ever reveal any shadow of regret that he had acted irregularly or even indiscreetly in any particular. He felt that his work was above



criticism, and his reputation permanently secure ; indeed, he did not speak so much in anger against his opponents, as in sorrow for their blindness, and in commiseration for the students deprived of his ministrations. This amazing power, in fact, of receiving rebuffs and reverses with complete unconcern, and without the smallest misgiving about the part he himself had played, was the strongest part of his defensive panoply against the assaults of life—the shield of faith, or rather of self-confidence, with which he quenched the fiery darts of the wicked. He was impervious to all adverse judgments, and his conscience never re-echoed an outside verdict. It was not that he refused to entertain any mistrust of the rightness of his own action ; he was mentally incapable of seeing that he could have been in the wrong. I do not think that he suffered, and hid his sufferings, for he was of all men the most plangent witness to the intensity of his own feelings.

Neither do I think that he was anxious to pose as a martyr. This would have been a difficult rôle to sustain, for he left Cambridge with a comfortable income derived from his fellowship and pensions. I believe that he did not trouble his head much about it all. He had a childlike power of being absorbed in the enterprise on hand ; and he settled rather gleefully at Bexhill, and made preparation to deluge the world with books. He often spoke of incessant activity as the one condition of happiness, and to activity he faithfully adhered.

He was converted to a belief in Christian Science by the Mayor of Bexhill, and this creed, which exorcises the ills of life by the practice of ignoring them, became highly congenial to him. He begged me



once to become a Christian Scientist; "such a convenient creed—it banishes the sense of sin." Though he had clung tenaciously to Cambridge for many years, the moment he quitted it, it became for him a place where no gentleman would willingly live. I remember his coming up to me in the Athenæum with that curious sidling motion of his big frame, taking my hand, and drawing me towards him as he was wont to do. "You're wasted at Cambridge, old man. Go out into the world! Come to Bexhill."

From Bexhill he moved to Rome and settled there in a flat; and I believe that this **was** the happiest time of his life. He acquired somehow the honorary style of Professor; he was elected into local Academies and Societies, he went much into society. In fact he became an institution, and was allowed to do and say what he pleased. It must not be forgotten that he had great if somewhat desultory geniality, he lavished little verbal compliments freely, and in general society people are grateful on the whole for a copious flow of talk; it fills up awkward gaps, and imparts an air of bonhomie to a gathering—though the same does not hold good of a *tête-à-tête*!

He had always had a succession of protégés, young men with mild ambitions, intellectual leanings, and physical charm. They had acted as his secretaries, and he invariably attached them to himself by many kindnesses. In Rome he had two of these, to whom I presume he dictated. For in this last decade his output was tremendous, nearly a million words of extemporisation, of which he said that it was not his fault if it had not all been published. Indeed it is recorded that when he undertook to write a History of the World—a narrative, so far as



my own knowledge of it goes, both dull and scrappy—he said that he had been at work on it for six months, and blamed himself very much that he had not got farther than the reign of George IV.

Of late I had many letters from him. I published a little biographical sketch of Dr. Warre, which drew from O. B. the statement that Warre had done more harm to the cause of education both at Eton and in the world at large than any man he knew. I made a rejoinder to this, which drew from him one of the most singular confessions I ever received from him. He said that I and all those who had served under Warre had been wholly demoralised and hypnotised by him. “The fact is,” he added, “that Eton has been going steadily from bad to worse ever since I left it; and Cambridge has lost both inspiration and efficiency since I was reluctantly extruded from my post. But what do I care? I have done my best, and shall work on to the end.”

## VI

It is difficult for those who knew O. B., and it would be impossible for those who did not know him, to disentangle the essential elements of a career and a temperament so extraordinary. My own impression is that he was a conspicuous case of a man of dual or even multiple personality. He had in certain respects a high ideal of life. He believed passionately in the higher culture, and the infinite possibilities of education. And here we should make a great mistake if we put down all his work as merely amateurish and shallow. He did, especially in early days, do much to quicken intellectual ardour in his younger friends and pupils. He had a great rapidity of brain



and true imaginative insight, though not of a poetical order ; and he wrote what was once an excellent style. If his equipment had been sounder and his knowledge more reliable, his industry and untiring pertinacity would have made him a very effective man. But he had an infinite capacity for not taking trouble, he hated drudgery, and he had no intellectual conscience.

Then again in his relations with others he had a great power of real and even romantic affection ; but this was evoked by charm and social grace and personal attractiveness more than by virtue or strength or toughness of intellect.

But what increasingly tended to submerge his strong points was his intense egotism. His unruffled complacency and his power of slamming the door upon all unfavourable criticism, however well-deserved, made him at all events a very happy man. And I can only say that his undiminished zest for life, his enjoyment of any excitement or turmoil, even when it centred detrimentally about himself, had a certain irresistible quality of fascination. In his absence, one tended to feel that he could not really be so incredibly ecstatic for the fray as he had left an impression of being ; but one met him again, and he was even more fervid and audacious than one would have believed possible, extracting delight out of the most humiliating catastrophes, and finding honeycomb in the broken jawbone.

He was incapable of learning by experience, and this was probably the ultimate source of his unsated relish for life. He exulted in the smallest indication of his own influence and success, and if he was confronted by damning proof of his own mismanagement



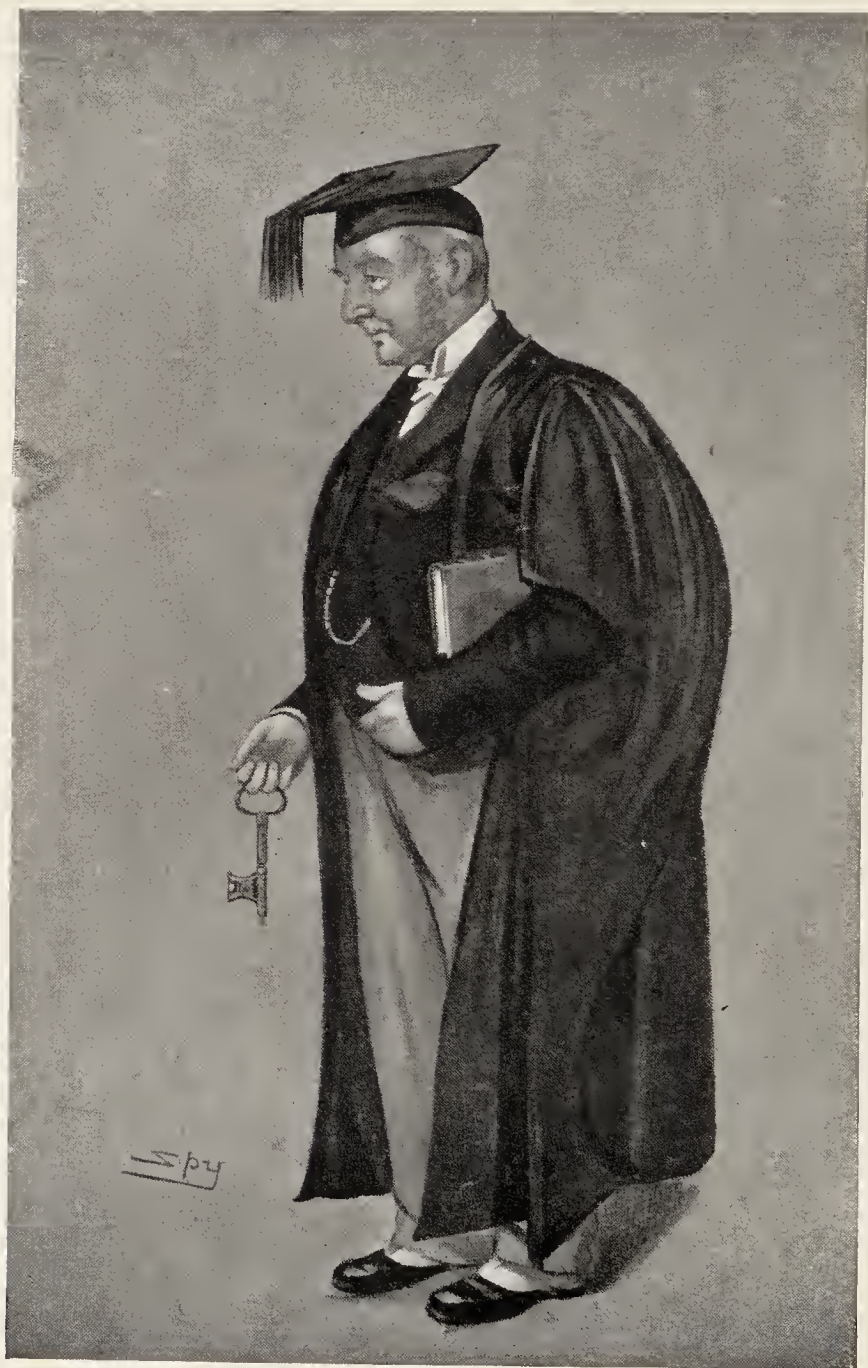
and wilfulness, he swept it all away as the inevitable detractor which must attend all conspicuous and triumphant supremacy.

Whether at any point of his life this fatal tendency to self-satisfaction could have been overcome, it is hard to say. I am myself inclined to believe that it was a congenital defect, a "blind spot" in his consciousness, which nothing could have obviated. It remains that he made in early days several faithful friends among men of high genius and virtue, that he attached to himself many pupils both distinguished and undistinguished, and that he enjoyed a career of extraordinary and consistent happiness, and warmed both hands with an enviable persistence before the fire of life.









EDWARD COMPTON AUSTEN-LEIGH.  
Lower Master of Eton, 1887-1905.  
By kind permission of the Proprietors of "Vanity Fair."



## IX

### EDWARD COMPTON AUSTEN LEIGH

#### I

It seems a natural instinct, and therefore arguably a wholesome one, to shrink from making a record of the life of a humorist. I suppose the fact is that a life summed up, and the volume closed, is always regarded from start to finish from the standpoint of death; and that when it comes to saying "I see that all things come to an end," there appears to be a certain levity in speaking fully and unguardedly of jests and pleasantries, as though life were on the whole too serious a thing to be lived so lightly and agreeably, or to be spoken of so jocosely. The moralist is apt to think that such genial trifling ought only to be sparingly interwoven into a record just by way of contrast, and to relieve the sombre and purposeful tracts of grave endeavour.

But I protest against such a theory. I do not think a man can do a better service for his fellow-creatures while he lives than to illumine and aerate the prosy events and drudgeries of life by a continual demonstration of its enlivening qualities, and by extracting the consolation and animation of humour out of unpromising and bewildering circumstances. In the first place it is an index of high courage and contentment to sustain the humorous perception of situations



in which the serious man is apt to despond and lament, and in the second place it indicates a real and incontrovertible fund of the *joie de vivre*, which becomes only a weak and hysterical affair if it is to be abashed and silenced by the mere thought of death.

So let me say at once that Edward Austen Leigh was a high-minded and generous man, with a strong sense of duty, great unselfishness, profoundly tender-hearted about grave matters, a real lover of work and order and peace. He was a man whom it was natural for his colleagues and friends to consult on difficult matters, and his advice was both shrewd and sympathetic. But he felt and acted these things, and was more disposed to take them for granted than to speak of them. Superficially he might be thought to be whimsical, prejudiced, ironical, and even caustic. He was quick-tempered, though by no means irritable, and he spoke his mind with unfailing vivacity. But no one who knew him personally could ever have a moment's doubt of the essential goodness, disinterestedness, and purity of his character, which was indeed all based upon the simplest and homeliest virtues. He was a man who won immediate respect and faithful affection for his almost childlike simplicity combined with great shrewdness and perception. But he did not choose to put a solemn face upon all this, and business over and duty faithfully performed, he enjoyed with all his might the variety, the interests, the contrasts of life ; and any account of him would be not only incomplete but wholly misleading which did not present him as an incomparable humorist—indeed, I hardly know whether his unconscious humour was not even superior in quality to his conscious and dramatic exercise of that



delightful gift. I only know that it was impossible to be dull or solemn in his presence, and that he communicated a perennial liveliness to the most commonplace and conventional of companies.

When I first went as a boy to Eton in 1874, Austen Leigh was a master of some fifteen years' standing and had a large boarding-house. He was a youthful-looking man, rubicund, intensely animated, with smooth brown hair and a light, rapid, elastic step. He had a high voice, rather shrill than strident, a large fund of explosive exclamations, and a keen-edged, derisive, and triumphant laugh. He was decidedly formidable as a teacher, partly because he was an excellent *moqueur*, and could make a boy ridiculous with a few sarcastic and yet not unkindly words; and partly because of an apparent irascibility which I believe was simulated for professional purposes, because he was one of the kindest and most good-natured of men. He was at once greatly respected and greatly enjoyed.

He had a peculiar, precise intonation, almost a drawl, the vowel sounds being oddly extended and emphasised. Thus he would say "myost" for "most," "lewdicrous" for "ludicrous," "extraordinary" where others said "extr'ordinary," "Pershia" for Persia (usually pronounced Persha), and "typhóid fever" (rhyming with "showéd") instead of "typhoid" (rhyming with "void"). Many of his words and phrases would be heralded by a peculiar crowing cough or clearing of his throat. When I was travelling once in Sicily with him, and had preceded the rest of the party on an expedition, the cabman who had conveyed him said, in answer to our enquiries, "I know him—the old man with



the flourishing face and the voice of a woman." He used an old-fashioned phraseology. He would call a boy an "urchin," and he was fond of saying "pray" where others would say "please," and of addressing a boy with whom he professed to be indignant as "Sir" or even "Sirrah." He loved to give his words a rhetorical turn. We used to repeat a sentence spoken by him at an Eton mission meeting, when, after much desultory and detailed argument, he rose and said, "Surely it would be more to the purpose to confine ourselves to the discussion of the subject, than to sit here for half the afternoon, analysing and scrutinising the report [a cough] paragraph by paragraph [another cough] and word by word!" At the end of the last afternoon school of the day he was traditionally supposed to give out a notice as to our occupation on the following morning, punctuated by many coughs and shrilly repressing all otiose questions: "To-morrow morning at half-past seven o'clock, you will bring to my schyool-ryoom, *not* my pupil-ryoom—silence, Herries!—a Latin dicshionary—Rolt, be silent, not a word, sir, not a syllable!—and with it a piece of broad-ryuled paper—*not* description paper—and, and—I insist upon silence [a loud cough]—and a *pen*!"

It must be said that he kept strict discipline, and was an extremely clear and scholarly teacher, not very inspiring, perhaps, but ceaselessly amusing, and with every sentence most precisely phrased.

He had, too, many picturesque oddities of manner and behaviour in public. He would come sauntering and tripping into chapel, the pink of freshness and health, looking curiously and inquisitively about him, as if he were endeavouring to detect the presence of



some intruder, and when he had taken his place, craning out beyond the desk to fix some unexpected visitor with a long and earnest scrutiny. When he rose from his knees after the initial prayers, he would take another short survey, catch sight of the rose in his buttonhole—he generally wore a flower—take up the lappet of his coat so as to smell it with careful research, shoot out his white cuffs so far that the linen of his shirt-sleeves would be visible, survey his plump hands and sleeve-links with satisfaction, clasp them over his head with a curious gesture, and then devote his attention to the service, with occasional sharp bird-like glances down the row of stalls.

He had no ear whatever for music, and his singing was a remarkable performance. It would begin by a low crooning, and as the organ rose to a climax his voice would become louder and higher, but with no relation to the melody.

He used in those days to play football, fives, and cricket. He had been in the Eton XI, and was a very good cricketer. I can see him now in flannel trousers and neat boots, taking very short, rapid steps, and dribbling with much agility; or batting cautiously and deliberately, with his underlip folded down outwards upon his chin. He used to hold his breath for the stroke, and then blow it out with great gusto, and while the ball was being returned to the bowler, walk rapidly round the wicket. Or I can see him again with very short steps, bowling slow overhand, rather bewildering balls with a good deal of break.

When he went to look on at matches, he was generally accompanied by a small silken-haired spaniel called *Nip*, who used to wander inconveniently



about the field ; and it was an endless delight to hear him recalling the dog with a shrill scream audible over the whole field. “ Nip, Nip, come back, sir [cough] *at once !* ” Nip was very leisurely and disobedient, and on his reluctant return, Austen Leigh used to apostrophise him, “ Nip, Nip—you are a very troublesome little dog ! What would you do, sir, if you had not so careful a master ? ”

## II

I did not come across him much as a boy, but when I came back as a master in 1885 I was frequently at his house and several times travelled with him, in those earlier years, in Italy and Sicily. He was an extraordinarily amusing fellow-traveller, endlessly inquisitive, untiring, and good-humoured. In Sicily, I remember, he travelled in a light suit of homespun, a Norfolk jacket, oddly confined by buttons at the wrist, knickerbockers, stockings, and neat shoes. His curiosity was unbounded. He was always up first in the morning, that he might return to his researches ; and at one place, where we were all sleeping on the ground-floor, I remember seeing him pass along the verandah, and peer fixedly into room after room, with his face pressed close against the glass. On one occasion, when we were having tea, he declined to join us, and descanted at length upon the absurdity and imprudence of touching either food or drink between luncheon and dinner. Then he excused himself saying that he had a little business to do. This happened once or twice, and one of the party with myself determined to follow him to ascertain what the business was. We saw him hurry down the street and turn into a restaurant. We gave him



time, and then went suddenly in and found him sitting at a small metal table regarding pleasantly a small glass of vermouth. We reminded him of his principles, to which he replied with a derisive laugh, "On the contrary, this is very wholesome!" At one long halt at a station, he went off on a voyage of exploration, and finding some vans on a siding with open doors, he clambered up, to our great amusement, into the first of them and disappeared from view. When he had satisfied himself as to the contents of the van, a roseate face was cautiously protruded from the door, and after looking first up and then down the line, as if to see that the vans were in due and orderly sequence, he got carefully down, and then inspected the interior of the next, until his investigations were complete.

On the St. Gothard he insisted on travelling through part of the tunnel in an external gallery of the carriage, to ascertain, as he said, "the degree of asphyxiation which I am told ensues." The result was that he returned with his face hideously begrimed. This caused some amusement when we stopped at the next station for luncheon, and he was entreated for the credit of the party to go and wash his face. "I shall do nothing of the kind! Pray, what are you all laughing at? I cannot conceive what you mean. I assure you that my face is spotlessly clean!"

Only once did I see a catastrophe. By some mistake his handbag, which had passed the custom-house, was brought back from a steamer on which we were about to embark, and was examined again. Unfortunately in the interval he had secreted a few treasured cigars in the bag. This was detected, and a small fine imposed. But the bag having been locked, it



was broken open. He became transported with indignation. "Pooh! I shall pay no fine. I have contravened no regulation! Very well then!" At this moment he became suddenly aware that the lock had been damaged. He bent over it, and then said in shrill tones, "But they have broken it!" He took a short turn round the table, and again examined the bag. "But they have broken it! I think nothing of the fine, nor of the loss of my cigars; but they have broken my bag!" He looked round with a wrathful gaze, once more said, "They have broken it!" and instantly recovered his good-humour.

He always fell a victim to every vendor, no matter what was offered him—fans, sweets, tortoise-shell boxes; and at intervals on returning to the carriage he would draw out his purchase and survey it with complacency.

He had a naturally sceptical mind, or perhaps a strong disinclination to accept any positive statement, or to concur with conclusions originated by others. Thus at a match if he was absent from the field when a wicket fell, he would enquire, on returning, how so-and-so got out. "Stumped," would be the reply. "Possibly!" he would say. In Sicily it was the same. He was fond in his way of flowers, and was for ever asking one of the party, who was an erudite botanist, the names of unknown flowers. The botanist would supply the name. "Per-haps!" Leigh would rejoin, with an incredulous shake of the head.

Again, I remember his alighting at a wayside station in Italy in order to purchase a glass of a singular pinkish country wine, which a man was offering on a tray. He paid an exorbitant price,



turned the liquid about in his hand, looked through it, holding it up to the light, took a good mouthful of it, and then, to the consternation of the vendor, rushed to the edge of the platform to disgorge it on to the line. "What is the matter with it?" said someone. "It was very sharp!" said Leigh, replacing the half-emptied glass on the tray, adding to the stupefied wine-seller, "No, I thank you; not any more to-day!"

I was once at Rome with him and some other friends, and we went to the Palatine. He had a new guide-book of which he was proud, but he would entrust it to no one, and insisted on showing us over the ruins by means of his diagram. He led the way, and announced in shrill tones the name of each hall and chamber with deliberate assurance. It became gradually obvious that something was wrong, when a minute and mean apartment, about the size of a larder, was proclaimed as "The Ambassadors' Hall of Audience!" "Isn't it very small?" said someone. "It is indeed!" said Austen Leigh—"it is surprisingly small!" But he would brook no intervention; till at the end it was discovered that he had been conducting us in the reverse order, so that, as one of the party pointed out, the number of rooms being even, and not odd, not a single apartment had been rightly named, not even the middle one. But Leigh was not disconcerted. "What, after all, does it matter?" he said triumphantly.

All this made him a most enlivening companion. But it must not be concluded that on these occasions he was a mere *farceur*. He was, on the contrary, a most energetic and appreciative sightseer, of insatiable curiosity and very wide and apt informa-



tion ; never weary or bored, and, except under circumstances of extreme provocation, invariably buoyant and good-humoured.

### III

The years went on ; he was one of the senior masters, a close ally of Dr. Warre's and a no less faithful critic of his schemes and projects. When J. L. Joynes—"Old Joynes," or "Jimmy," as he was popularly called—resigned, Austen Leigh was made Lower Master, that is to say, the Headmaster's deputy. This necessitated his taking a Fourth Form division, while he became responsible for the discipline of the Lower School, and for the services of the Lower Chapel, in which he took the most unfeigned interest and delight, choosing his preachers very carefully and selecting the hymns with immense attention to their appropriateness. Thus a lesson about St. Mary Magdalene would be followed by the hymn "Conquering Kings," because of the verse

"Jesu, Who dost condescend  
To be called the sinner's Friend."

And he was further credited, though I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the statement, with appointing that the hymn "God moves in a mysterious way" should always be sung on the days announced for the meetings of the Governing Body.

Early in his occupancy of the post of Lower Master, at the first Ash Wednesday service at which he presided, he read the Commination exhortation, assigned to the priest. On coming away, I pointed out the incorrectness of this to him. He laughed and said, "I shall continue to read it!" I was at Lambeth shortly



afterwards, and consulted my father's legal secretary on the point. The secretary said that it was a difficult question, but he believed that a layman who read it could be proceeded against for "brawling in church." I told this to Austen Leigh, who said, "So he may think!" But he never delivered the exhortation again.

He used to read the Lessons with great relish and dramatic force, especially the contentious and argumentative ones. There used to be an unusual crowd of masters to hear him read the chapter about the healing of the man born blind, and I can recall the derisive cadence of his voice in the words, "Why, here is a marvellous thing." He was fond, too, of a Pauline argument; but what provoked the most amusement was his rendering of the verse in Job, "I am a brother unto dragons, and a companion unto owls!"

Once I recollect walking with him to the Lower Chapel service. I generally went to the Upper Chapel, and he greeted me with a smiling salute, "So we are to be honoured to-day!" There was a big, loutish Lower boy, rather a hero among the small boys for his supposed strength, who had that morning ventured to appear, in virtue of having received his house colours, in a pair of patent-leather boots. We happened to catch him up as he was swaggering along with some admiring satellites. Austen Leigh's restless eyes were attracted by these boots, but instead of giving a direct rebuke, he walked slowly along by the side of the boy, with his eyes riveted on the unhappy creature's feet. The boy tried to drop behind, but Leigh stopped too and continued to gaze. Then he said to me in a plaintive and meditative tone,



audible half-way down the lane, "What remarkably large feet that boy has, to be sure!" The obnoxious boots never reappeared.

His inquisitiveness rather increased than diminished with the years. I remember standing talking to him in the street a few yards from the opening of Keate's Lane. While we talked a sudden irresistible impulse of curiosity overcame him. He left me, hurried to the turning, rapidly scrutinised the scene, as though afraid of missing some unwonted sight, and returned to pick up the talk. The smallest event, every match or contest or occasion, attracted him ungovernably. There was a singular scene when a statue of Waynflete, given by some Sussex Etonians, was erected in a niche in the west wall of the Chapel. There was a large gathering. Some of the donors attended in smiling complacency. Bishop Durnford of Chichester dedicated the monument. An address was read, and Provost Hornby was asked to unveil the statue, which stood in the niche muffled with sacking. He advanced and was handed a rope, at which he pulled mournfully as though he were tolling a bell. The sacking remained obdurate. The donors blushed, the boys tittered. Warre, in his silk gown, a figure of might, strode out angrily, seized the rope and gave it a great tug. The rope broke and came away in his hand, but the statue stood as impenetrably shrouded as ever. A shrill laugh from Austen Leigh completed the confusion, and amid general laughter a ladder was brought and the sacking was with difficulty torn down.

He disliked, on coming into school, to find boys making a noise in the schoolyard and larking about. "Come here, you boys," he is reported to have said



on one of these occasions. "How often have I said that I will not permit this! Come here, I know all your names—and pray what is your name, sirrah?" In his own class-room, known as the Lower School, an old panelled chamber with odd wooden arches supporting the ceiling, and much-carved desks and shutters, the flogging-block stood against the wall. He was a very determined castigator, and an upper boy complained of to Warre, who would naturally have officiated, on finding Warre absent and the Lower Master acting for him, would follow Austen Leigh to the scene of execution with a very rueful countenance. If a little boy was troublesome, Leigh would say, "Stand up in your place, sir. Stand up on the form. I see you are incorrigible—go and sit upon the block, sir; and have a care that you do not soon find yourself there, occupying a reverse position!" But his bark was always worse than his bite, and he was very good-natured and patient with his "urchins."

In his own house he used to cause great amusement by soliloquising as he went along the passages. As he tripped along, the last thing, saying good night to the boys, he used to be heard to say, surveying the gas-lit passages, "What a lot of boots!"

But I remember him best as an entertainer. He was endlessly hospitable. He inhabited a spacious house of red and yellow brick in the lane leading down to Colenorton, with a pleasant garden at the back. He gave dinner-parties once or twice a week. The house had a drawing-room furnished in an early Victorian style, with some good pictures, both in oil and water-colour. He was in a guileless and rather conventional way something of a connoisseur. I do



not imagine that he got much more pleasure out of art than out of music ; but it was part of the equipment, so to speak, of the accomplished, open-handed man of taste and culture. He used to speak with a certain solemnity about art. When we travelled, he always went to see the well-known pictures, and pronounced them magnificent, myost magnificent. He once went so far as to go and hear *Israel in Egypt* at the Handel Festival with his brother Willy, who was a cultivated musician and an excellent pianist, and on his return he was able to assure us that it was magnificent !

In the dining-room we sat at a round table, and everything was excellent. He ate and drank heartily. I can hear him, as the cover was removed from a goose before him, crying out, " A green gosling ! " He used to have grouse and other birds sent him from his moor in Scotland. There was an evening when a brace of old and finely-developed cock-grouse were on the table. They were carved with difficulty, and Walter Durnford, whose freedom of speech was licensed, after vainly endeavouring to chip a few fragments off a leg, exclaimed, " I believe, Edward, that this grouse has ranged the hills of Scotland since the creation ! It tastes of the old red sandstone ! " This was greeted by a shrill peal of laughter from Austen Leigh, who then replied gravely, " I find mine very good ! "

At one time he bought the cellar of an old Fellow of King's, which had been laid down in the fifties ; the owner, having taken a College living, left his cellar behind him. When he died, it was sold, and Austen Leigh, out of sheer kindness, bought the whole stock at a good price. He was much interested in his



purchase, and used to produce all sorts of strange old wines, in odd, solid, squat bottles. Much of the wine had gone to complete grief. Once he offered us some Hermitage, a singular tawny fluid, with dark shadows, and odd little white fragments of a disturbed crust floating in it, which turned and sparkled in the glass, and at last subsided to the bottom. The wine had gone piercingly sour. Walter Durnford accepted some, took a cautious sip, covered his mouth with his hand and called faintly for water. It was given him. He swallowed it and said, "It is indeed a curious wine. It may be called Hermitage, but to me it tastes exactly like corked quinine!" Austen Leigh cackled with laughter, and sipping his own glass, with his face all corrugated by its astringent qualities, exclaimed at intervals, "I rather like it!"

It was at these dinners that he was always in his best form, overflowing with jests and geniality. His brothers, all sociable and cheerful men, often came to stay with him. Spencer Austen Leigh, who farmed in Sussex, always came for the Ascot meeting. "Spencer does not care about racing," Austen Leigh used to explain beforehand, "but he is interested in the breed of horses."

He took much pleasure on these occasions in telling us of his own dilemmas and misadventures. One evening he related how a boy in his house had been behaving badly, and how he had written a letter on the subject to the boy's father. "I had hardly finished the letter, when the father himself called and was shown in. I said to him, 'I have just finished a letter to you about Jack, who has been behaving badly, and I will read it to you.' As I was reading it, at the end of one sentence the father said, 'You



will excuse me, Mr. Austen Leigh, but I do not believe that the last sentence which you read is in your letter at all ! ' ' Austen Leigh made a pause, and looking round with a cunning air, said to the party, " Nor was it ! " and followed it up with a shrill laugh.

He was very fond of going off, even in the middle of dinner, to get a book of reference to settle some disputed point. Some discussion had arisen, and everyone present gave their views. Austen Leigh hurried off, returned with a *Who's Who*, and after looking up the point, exclaimed triumphantly, " I was wrong—but nobody else was right ! "

On one occasion he said that there was a boy in his division, called Lambert, with an astonishing likeness to an old acquaintance of his, Lord Cavan ; " And," he added, " I suspect him of being a cousin ! " " That would be very odd," said Impey, " because Lord Cavan's name is Lambart, and not Lambert ! " " You surprise me," said Austen Leigh, " and I ought to know, for when he was in the school he was certainly called Lambert. I have called him so myself, scores of times." Presently he went meditatively out of the room, and returned with a *Peerage*. After turning over the pages, he said to Impey, " You are right—and I now clearly recollect that Lord Cavan was Lambart, *not* Lambert. But after all," with an air of triumph, " it makes but little difference, because there is another boy in my division called Lambart, who I more than suspect is certainly a cousin of Lord Cavan's." What had become of the astonishing likeness we were not told.

He was incontrovertible in argument, because he always managed to slip off on some side-issue, while he found it impossible to leave any positive statement



unchallenged. Two brothers were mentioned who were in the School XI together, both fast bowlers. Austen Leigh said to Allcock, who was a great critic of the game, "Allcock, I should like your opinion. Which of the two do you consider the faster bowler, the major or the minor?" Allcock said, "Well, there is not much to choose between them, but the major is certainly the faster." "You surprise me exceedingly!" said Austen Leigh. "In my opinion, the minor is, if anything, incomparably the faster bowler."

On another occasion one of the Cobbolds dined there; he had been playing cricket all day in a team of Old Etonians against the School XI. The visitors had made a very poor show, and Austen Leigh rallied Cobbold unmercifully on the subject. At last Cobbold said, "I hope, sir, you didn't think I was captaining the team?" "I did not," said Austen Leigh, with a malicious smile, "until I saw you go on to bowl!"

He was certainly a master of dialectic. There was a famous argument which he held with one of his colleagues, Herbert Tatham, on the merits of a master, who may be called Pearson, in the pulpit. Pearson was in rather general demand as a preacher, and used to preach both in Upper and Lower Chapel. Tatham said that he thought Pearson's sermons in Upper Chapel were both long and dull, but that when he preached in Lower Chapel to the small boys he was much more effective.

"You astonish me!" said Austen Leigh. "I myself think that Pearson's sermons in the Upper Chapel have invariably something solid and even impressive about them; but in the Lower Chapel they



are puerile—contemptible alike in matter and manner.”

Tatham pursued his point and said that he thought it all depended on whether they were written sermons or preached extempore ; he said that he thought Pearson’s written sermons, such as he gave in Upper Chapel, were both confused and confusing, but that when he spoke extempore, as he generally did to the small boys, they were both interesting and paternal.

“ I cannot agree with you ! ” said Austen Leigh. “ Pearson’s written sermons are at least connected discourses—I could not call them lively—but his extempore harangues are destitute alike of logic and common sense ! ”

“ Well,” said Tatham, “ the only thing I am afraid of when Pearson preaches extempore is that he will come to a stop.”

“ And I, on the contrary,” said Austen Leigh, “ am afraid that he will never leave off ! ”

#### IV

I have said enough of his ready and argumentative humour and of his perennial irony ; but they were both endearing and delightful. It was impossible ever to be dull in his company, and his jests, however personal, never left a sting. They caused much innocent amusement, and indeed only increased the sincere respect and affection felt for him. He was a strange compound of qualities. He belonged by all his instincts to the squirearchy—his father, it may be said, was both squire and parson ; and as for his humour, was he not a great-nephew of Jane Austen ? I have often wished that she might have had the pleasure of depicting him ! But these were his



sociable moods ; and all the time he was shrewd and quick, and an excellent man of business. He was astonishingly rapid in seizing a point, adroit in argument, and tenaciously contentious. Even if he agreed with a colleague, he enjoyed finding some flaw in his argument or language. But his judgment was very good, and his conclusions always sensible and just. As a housemaster he was very popular with his boys, sharp and decisive in manner, but always reasonable and kindly, when he had satisfied his taste for irony. He was extremely guileless, and in spite of his ardent inquisitiveness, very unobservant. He was for ever looking round corners and seeing nothing. He left his boys very independent, trusted them entirely, and though he exercised his wit upon them he could never bring himself to speak evil of anyone, and stuck up for his pupils through thick and thin. If a colleague, for instance, complained to him that a boy was impudent, he would say, " I confess that you surprise me. It is strange that you should have selected for that particular aspersion the boy whom I am accustomed to regard, whether rightly or wrongly, as the most diffident boy, without exception, I have ever had in my house."

He was one of the most kind-hearted men I have ever known, though he prided himself quite erroneously on successfully concealing the fact. He was prodigally generous. He subscribed to everything and gave splendid gifts very unobtrusively.

He had many of the characteristics of the child about him. He was innocent, petulant, irascible, and yet tender-hearted. He was a good scholar and fond of general reading, but an acute rather than an intellec-



tual man. His real interest was in life rather than in books or even people.

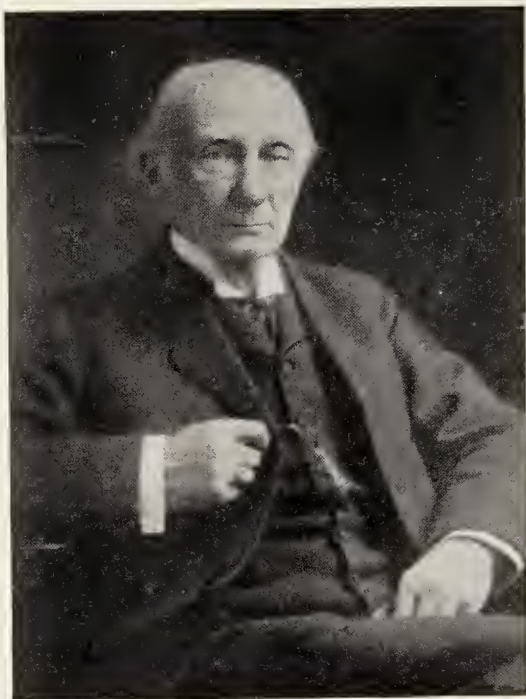
He had long been anxious to give up school work, but with characteristic unselfishness he delayed his retirement for the sake of his old friend, Dr. Warre, who depended greatly upon his advice and co-operation. Eventually he took a little house which had been built by Warre, Colenorton by name. He had always taken a considerable share in local civil business. He was on the County Council, Chairman of the Urban District Council, and a very active magistrate. Indeed, I think his duties on the bench interested him more than almost any other, partly because he saw human nature there at its barest, and partly because it gave him infinite opportunities of doing the right thing for the wrong, or at all events the unexpected, reason.

Latterly he had a good deal of ill-health. He had always been a robust man, and he was impatient of diet and régime, and took little exercise. But he bore his troublesome ailments with unabated cheerfulness, being always kindly, sociable, talkative, and hospitable. Indeed, his whole career was full of activity and benevolence, and I know few men who enjoyed life more, or who made fewer enemies. He was naturally high-minded, duty-loving, and honourable; and for bonhomie, simplicity, and loyalty he can have had but few equals.









*Elliott & Fry.*

FRANCIS WARRE WARRE-CORNISH.  
Vice-Provost of Eton, 1893-1916.



BLANCHE WARRE-CORNISH.  
Circa 1875.



## X

### BLANCHE WARRE-CORNISH

#### I

It too often happens, when men and women of singular personal charm and marked originality die, that no record is made of them, unless they have distinct and tangible achievements to their credit. And yet the impressions of such characters are often far better worth recording than lives of more equable performance and more solid and patent successes.

The reason of this is that such persons give to the artistic and beautiful handling of life and its occasions the energy, the richness of perception, and the settled purpose that more directly practical natures reserve for their professional activities. And thus these airy effects of spontaneous talk, subtle humour, generous emotion, swift comprehension, charming gesture, which make the presence and companionship of these adorable natures so stimulating and enchanting, all fade and perish upon the air, because they are so difficult to recapture and fix, and from their very abundance embarrass the sluggish memory.

Mrs. Cornish, and her husband as well, were both personalities of this rare sort. I spent much time in the company of each, and never without the sense of a heightened value in life, a feeling of wider horizons, more free issues, deeper insight, finer quality. To



make an accurate and detailed record is impossible ; but I shall try just to give a personal impression of one whom I regarded with profound admiration and regard, and who seems to me one of the few people I have ever known who was invariably and without any exception interesting, surprising, and rewarding, even though she was at times baffling and indeed impenetrable.

## II

Blanche Warre-Cornish was by birth a Ritchie, the daughter of a distinguished Indian official, who was ultimately Legal Member of the Council for India. It was a large family. One of her brothers was the late Sir Richmond Ritchie, whose widow, Lady Ritchie, a daughter of Thackeray, is the well-known writer. One of Mrs. Cornish's sisters was the late Mrs. Douglas Freshfield, another is Mrs. Herbert Paul.

She herself married, in the sixties, the late Frank Warre-Cornish, then a master at Eton, and afterwards for many years Vice-Provost. He was himself a first-rate scholar and a good historian. But he was much more than that. His mind had a touch of genius, though it is hard to say exactly where it lay ; beyond his wide intellectual range, his accurate knowledge of literature, history, and politics, his clear and critical brain, there was a sympathy, an enthusiasm, and an instinctive perception of beauty which, combined with a fresh and unfailing humour, gave his mind an extraordinary charm. Art, music, architecture, scenery—he approached them, so to speak, from the inside ; it seemed almost impossible to find anything which did not interest him ; but he was in no sense a dilettante. The word culture has dreary associations, and generally seems to imply a laborious



remoteness and a disdainful superiority. But Frank Cornish was cultured to the finger-tips, and yet entirely modest and unaffected. He was never pained by anyone's limitations, nor did he employ his knowledge to humiliate the ignorant. And then too he had an intense interest in other people, and a lively perception of the contrasts of temperament, with a deep capacity for affection, and a fine imaginative quality which showed itself, though incompletely, in that book of ripe and beautiful reflection, *Sunningwell*.

As a teacher he was not perhaps quite effective. He disliked superimposed ornament, vague sentiment, shoddy pretentiousness, and his teaching was bare and dry. Neither was he very business-like about his work. In his boarding-house, on the other hand, he contrived somehow to evoke an extraordinary independence, *esprit de corps*, and personal devotion. In person, he was, in early days, a small, frail, ethereal-looking creature with long light hair, though he latterly looked preternaturally worn and aged. But he was tough and agile till a late age, and, as he talked, his face was irradiated by one of the most charming and all-pervading smiles I have ever seen. He was a man whose powers seemed to entitle him to a larger sphere ; but he just stopped short of being practical, and though deeply interested in educational reform, was never able to formulate it effectively.

### III

My first sight of Mrs. Cornish was at Eton in 1875. They asked me, with two or three other small boys, to tea, a meal at six o'clock, then common at Eton among the masters. It was a fairly substantial kind



of dinner—fish, cutlets, a tart, tea or wine as you liked. It must have been a Sunday evening, I think, for I remember staying vaguely on, contentedly silent in an arm-chair and hearing music.

The house they then lived in at Eton, known to many generations of Etonians as Tarver's, was a curious irregular place, with a little low Georgian front of red brick. On one side was a flagged alley, called Judy's passage, running between high blank garden-walls, and on the other the little street called Common Lane. To this attractive dwelling-house a great, gaunt, red-brick, barrack-like structure, containing the boys' bedrooms and offices, had been clumsily appended. But the part they themselves inhabited was a small, quaint, panelled place, the dining-room a low square parlour with round table, on the left of the front door; at the back had been added by some earlier occupant a hall with a staircase, rather dark and pretentious, in pitch-pine, and behind that a fair-sized drawing-room, quiet and airy, looking out on the garden, with a door in the corner that led on to the study and pupil-room.

The whole aspect and furnishing of the place was attractive. Morris papers and chintzes, some china, artistic pictures, a bowl of roses, readable books everywhere, but nothing *voulu* or precious about it, just a fine taste expressing itself simply: it all had an engaging air of use and comfort, governed by a sense of beauty, of having associations inherited from a well-ordered past, of being infused with a charm that came from some region behind the ordinary bare, robust, scholastic life.

Mrs. Cornish was a comely and kindly hostess, unembarrassed, but a little mysterious; she had



much grace and distinction of air. I suppose she was hardly thirty, some years younger than her husband, but her manner was at once eager and self-possessed. She had a certain unconscious graciousness of demeanour and natural dignity which seemed to give peculiar value to a question or a friendly word. She was animated and absent-minded by turns; and whichever she was, it was somehow always a surprise. But there was no doubt that they were both somehow very different from other masters and masters' wives. There was nothing professional about them: that element, both then and afterwards, never appeared in either of them. They belonged to a larger sort of world, and were in touch with wider influences, both artistic and intellectual. Interesting people came and went, good music was to be heard there without being planned or arranged for. The talk was animated and full of freshness, ideas and books lightly touched upon, allusions with a mysterious charm, fancies understood without being laboriously explained.

## IV

Mrs. Cornish was for some reason considered to be formidable by the boys, I think because she had a way of asking disconcerting questions, and awaiting an answer with a certain decisive emphasis, as though she expected something with a touch of brilliance. She suddenly asked me, for instance, on that occasion, before two or three schoolfellows at tea, *through whose eyes I looked on nature*. I was dumb, and seeing my consternation, she prompted me by adding, after an awe-inspiring pause, "Through Kingsley's?" I remember well how I was derided afterwards, not for my speechlessness, but as being the kind of boy of



whom such things were asked. Cornish, we believed, nourished a secret wish, which he was thought hardly robust enough to indicate, that his wife would not say such fantastic things. It was even said that he had been heard to murmur faint ejaculations and remonstrances to himself under his breath, when she engaged in one of her more daring flights. This tradition that Cornish was apathetically dismayed by the publicity of his wife's cleverness—it was always freely admitted that she was clever—was I suppose invented by some ingenious, romancing boy ; a perceptive boy, fond of trying to interpret the life he sees about him, is very apt to hit upon an acrimonious parody of a situation, and to evolve a crude and violent collision out of what is a complex and delicate relation. I can have no doubt that Cornish saw clearly enough that his wife surprised and disconcerted boys and older people as well—that something surprising and slightly extravagant was expected from her, and that, after a characteristic utterance, her hearers would glance at each other with that touch of amused satisfaction which indicated that they felt they had got their money's worth, and had something tangible to carry away. This he certainly saw, for he saw everything ; but he also saw, as anyone did who came to know Mrs. Cornish well, that her remarks were neither premeditated nor affected, but that she said exactly what came into her head, and owing perhaps even more to the intensity of her sympathy than to her fineness of perception, the words she used were sometimes a little over-emphatic, and ahead of her listeners' mood—though this gave a pleasant flavour of mystery, a cryptic turn, to her sayings.

In the earlier years she was not oracular ; she was



puzzling, critical, even provocative, but always with grace and distinction. And here at the outset I should like to make my conviction plain, a conviction not soon arrived at, but slowly increasing through many years of friendly and even intimate intercourse—that Mrs. Cornish mystified people, and even continued to do so, by being one of the most unaffected and outspoken people I have ever seen. Her mind worked very rapidly, and as it moved picked up many threads of allusion and suggestion, and omitting the obvious links and prosaic connections, came to the surface in a remark which often condensed a whole train of thought and summed up an unspoken reverie. I believe that she always said exactly what came into her mind, not absently or remotely, but with a vivid and enthusiastic sympathy; and that the sentences, which sometimes disconcerted a talker, and seemed to make a hurried abandonment of the subject the only possible course, were designed to encourage and stimulate further discussion. Far from being vague or discursive, she was only too brilliantly intent upon the subject. It was like the huntress queen :

“ How fleet thou comest, cheering on  
Thy panting hounds with hue and cry.”

I do not mean that the problem was always clear; she was a talker rather than a writer, and had no marked gift of logical presentment; but her talk was full of beautiful echoes; and then, too, she was so gracious and self-possessed, with the manner of the *salon*, the dramatic sympathy with the group as well as the individual, that if she broke the circuit, it was more because of the dull perception of her



hearers than because of the swiftness of her own range of thought. She must have been busy in those days, for they had a big boarding-house and a growing family ; yet she wrote a couple of novels, one with a musical bent, *Alcestis*—a book with a certain charm of enthusiasm, though the style is obviously immature, and the whole conception more intellectual than emotional ; the other, *Northam Cloisters*, is a love-story framed in the gossip-loving setting of a cathedral close. I fancy that the book was written somewhat under the influence of Mrs. Oliphant, who lived in Windsor at the time and was often down at Eton ; but I do not think that Mrs. Cornish was mentally equipped for realism in any form. She had little faculty of absorbed observation. She could not acquiesce in being bored. She could perceive swiftly and even penetratingly where her interests were aroused ; she could admire generously and criticise pungently ; but I think that the majority of human beings were to Mrs. Cornish as “ moving shadow-shapes that come and go ” ; she had a singular power of abstraction and inattention at times.

## v

In the course of the seventies the Cornishes moved into an adjacent boarding-house with the not inappropriate name of Holland House. It is a stately little mansion of Georgian date, built of old yellow brick, owning a beautiful drawing-room with a large round bow-window and some quaint touches of early nineteenth-century Gothic woodwork, looking into a spacious walled garden with a lawn and solid shrubberies ; and here, it seems to me, the social occasions assumed a more stately aspect. It was



all simple enough ; yet the dinner-parties and evening gatherings in that house always seem in my memory to have had a quite peculiar kind of distinction. Instead of being just the homely assemblies of a professional circle, they were occasions penetrated with a sense of importance and solemnity, and linked with the bigger world. There were visitors of note, men and women with the delicate aroma of affairs and larger interests about them. People moved, spoke, intervened, withdrew with a difference. Mrs. Cornish was an admirable hostess, unembarrassed, decisive, sympathetic. She talked herself with animation and absorption, but yet with a watchful prescience. No one was allowed to be neglected, a tongue-tied group was smilingly broken up, a wandering derelict moored in a quiet haven. She was neither uneasy nor preoccupied, full of tranquil enjoyment and interest herself, but yet managing the whole affair with instinctive deftness and prompt resource. Frank Cornish himself was just as unembarrassed and entertaining, drifting hither and thither like an elderly Ariel, leisurely, low-voiced, humorous, subtle rather than emphatic. But he assumed no direction—he aided and abetted rather than initiated ; and Mrs. Cornish, though one could hardly realise it at first, was the moving spirit of the whole.

But the happiest of all their migrations was when in the nineties Cornish was made Vice-Provost and College Librarian. The office is a kind of lay canonry, and has no educational function. They moved into a quaint and beautiful house in the Cloisters, looking out on the college garden and the river, with the Castle beyond. It was a perfect setting of dignity



and leisure, and they used it to the full. They were very hospitable, received many interesting guests, and, what was best of all, made a great point of encouraging a large number of boys from the school to come freely and easily to the house. The sort of influence of which the Cornishes had the secret cannot be directly communicated, it can only be absorbed; and many sensitive and intelligent boys have reason to be grateful for the frank intimacy in which they came in touch with Cornish's wise and mellow humour, and Mrs. Cornish's penetrating and encouraging regard.

I do not know when it dawned upon the world that Mrs. Cornish was a character of singular impressiveness, with a peculiar dignity of her own, a real touch of genius, a vivid wit, and what was best of all, a rich mine of quite unexpected and even unintentional humour, whatever she did. The discovery was made outside of Eton, and the legend was duly adorned.

Sir Henry and Lady Ponsonby were close friends of the Cornishes, and their sons, when at Eton, boarded in Cornish's house. Lady Ponsonby was a woman of infinite spirit, intense humour, and strong critical insight; she was a great reader, especially of French literature; she formed her own opinions and loved originality in any shape. The Ponsonby family thoroughly appreciated and delighted in Mrs. Cornish. They asked her to the Castle constantly. I remember Lady Ponsonby saying that one of the chief delights of Mrs. Cornish's company was her entire unexpectedness, both of speech and demeanour, and the fact that you could never predict her mood or attitude.



There was certainly always an air of mystery about Mrs. Cornish's arrangements. She did not say what she was going to do, nor did she ever condescend to explain why she had done it. I remember, for instance, at my own home, when she was staying there, that, in the middle of a conversation of some interest, in which she had been taking an animated part, she suddenly rose, and with quick, hurried steps and an air of determination on her face, hastened from the room and appeared no more. But the explanation of this was simple enough. She had a real horror of intrusion, of being thought to be in the way, and could not bear to think that others should feel responsible for entertaining her. Her estimate of her own conversational powers was a very modest one, and the least suspicion of weariness or perplexity, even if the thought only existed in her own mind, was sufficient to make her decamp. Indeed, I never remember a less exacting guest, or one who acquiesced more genially in any arrangement proposed. For instance, she was once going over to lunch with two friends who lived near Windsor, but she would not announce the time of her arrival, or consent to be met at the station ; and it afterwards appeared that, in order to avoid any excess or redundancy of sojourn, she had spent most of the morning sitting in the heather not far from the house and solacing herself with a book. She was seldom betrayed, indeed, into vague sociabilities, and always knew exactly how much time she proposed to allot to them.

I suppose it is natural that her rare rebukes, hiding, as they did, a sharp point under what might seem at first sight a graceful compliment, linger most in memory. There was a time when a relative returned



from a long foreign tour, and the first evening was pleasantly occupied by reminiscences of travel, the interesting persons encountered, the romantic scenes visited. So far so good. But when on the following day the reminiscences began again at breakfast, it became clear to Mrs. Cornish that the home current of talk must not be flooded by the recital of adventures, however picturesque and vivid. Soon after breakfast, while the narrative was in full flow, Mrs. Cornish absented herself and returned with a packet of sermon-paper, which she put into the hands of the speaker, and said urgently and enthusiastically, "This is too good to be lost; you must write it all down—every word!"

I remember how I went to a little dinner-party there. For some reason the party was dull and tongue-tied. Frank Cornish himself was benevolent, but in an inaudible mood, as if his body had grown wearied before his mind. Mrs. Cornish herself was in a remote dream. The result was that I, not from any disinterested or benevolent impulse, but to save myself from the discomfort of a mute and frozen circle, told anecdotes, uttered platitudes, contested statements, and displayed what seemed even to myself a persistent and feverish volubility. Later in the evening I was talking to Mrs. Cornish in a corner of the pleasant drawing-room, with its books and its big panel of tapestry, when she fixed her penetrating glance upon me and said gaily, "What a pity it is that you are only a *tête-à-tête* talker!"

She encountered, one soaking day, in the streets of Windsor, a party of half-drenched, sadly resigned friends who were going on a water-party. "Ah!"



said Mrs. Cornish, " the river is the best place on a day like this ; there are no puddles ! "

There was one occasion when at a little dinner-party of theirs the talk languished and " the refluent gloom saddened the gaps of song." " What time is it ? " said Mrs. Cornish suddenly, as if to herself. " It seems like midnight ! "

## VI

I do not know exactly what it was that in the early nineties led Mrs. Cornish to the Church of Rome. It was certainly a great surprise to many of her friends. Cornish himself was a liberal Churchman, believing in the Anglican Church as a human and characteristically British product, with just as much formality as an Englishman could stand, and with the minimum of discipline that would serve to keep any system in shape. The Anglo-Saxon is in religion, in fact, as in everything else, respectful rather than obedient. Cornish himself was at one time inclined to take Orders and had a correspondence with Bishop Westcott on the subject ; but it was clear that his dogmatic beliefs were not defined or positive enough to justify the step. He certainly loved Church tradition and order, and wrote an admirable history of the Anglican Church, but he was intellectual rather than mystical, and claimed a large liberty of opinion.

I do not think that Mrs. Cornish was attracted to the Church of Rome either by its antiquity or by its artistic dignity, or even its corporate sense of brotherhood, for she was always an individualist. She was indifferent to ceremonial, and was essentially modern in spirit ; nor do I believe that she had any specially mystical bent. Probably as her children grew up



she had more leisure to reflect, to criticise life, to become aware of its weakness, its uncomforted spaces, its dangers, its unexpected emptinesses. She had lived, I believe, very eagerly and rapturously, and had plucked experience with an eager hand. Now her health failed somewhat, society was a strain, the ideas and emotions which she had revelled in had a lack of finality about them, while the road ahead passed into the mist. I certainly had never realised that she had ever been more than intellectually interested in religion before ; life itself, ideas, art, music—those influences had brimmed the emotional channels ; but she was too proud and too ardent to think of life as a failure, and it may have been that she needed something large, enfolding, serene, some authoritative power which would take the responsibility, silence the doubt, sustain the anxious mind, and above all dictate a simple and wholesome discipline which could be implicitly obeyed—though this is but my own interpretation. I believe that it was the craving of a free and vital nature, a little tired of independence and initiative, for a mental and spiritual régime and a settled habit.

A friend, who knew her well, writes about her conversion :

“ She was always passionate, always anxious to conclude. She could not make a pillow of doubts. The tragic sense of life was never long absent from her mind ; serenity was impossible to her ; she distrusted in others the serenity which was based on compromise. Opinions expressing a tentative despair or trust in a vague hope provoked her, and she often struck at them, even when the speaker was one she loved. Roman Catholicism appealed to her because



it explained and even dramatised for her the beauty, courage, and tragedy of life, and because it was uncompromising. I don't think she could conceive of certainty as something gradually distilled from experience; it had to be wrenched at a moment of insight from life, and then held by the will as a possession."

This comment, I am sure, shows real insight into a situation and attitude which remained somewhat of a mystery to many of her friends; and it is confirmed by a talk which I had with Mrs. Cornish herself after the funeral of Frank Cornish. She had been very calm and natural, neither flustered nor agitated, but sweeping majestically about, speaking to everybody, and perfectly unaffected. She sent for me to have a word with me, and she told me about his end; how she had been sitting with him, and he became very *grave*.

Then she talked about his religious faith, a little impatiently. "Oh, yes, it was always beautiful, but it was something exterior to him which he loved and admired. . . . Protestants are only concerned about living; they don't learn how to die!"

She suffered no apparent loss of critical power, nor did she become meekly submissive. But though she was never, so to speak, dominated by Catholicism, it concentrated what had been perhaps a vaguely æsthetic impulse or a sustained religious emotion. As I have said, I doubt if the historical tradition of the Catholic Church appealed much to her, or even its sense of brotherhood, for she always made up her own mind. But the system largely increased her personal happiness, gave her a moral discipline which she desired, and vitalised her moral force; she did



not interest herself in movements or organisation ; but she rose to emergencies and confronted crises, at a time of life when many women find their inner energies decreasing, with a calm courage and a practical grasp which might almost have been mistaken for hardness.

There was a lamentable disaster at Eton, when a boarding-house was burnt down and two boys suffocated in their beds. Mrs. Cornish, who as the wife of the Vice-Provost, the Provost being a widower, had an informal kind of precedence among the ladies of Eton, took command of the situation with a serene promptitude which surprised all but those who knew her best. With her own hands she laid out and arrayed the bodies of the poor victims, and arranged everything in so dignified and beautiful a way, that when the unhappy relatives arrived, no susceptibilities were needlessly shocked and outraged. It was a combination of delicate perception and decisive action of which few would have been capable.

## VII

It is curious how tenacious a preconceived idea can be. Even in these later years, and with much clear evidence to the contrary, Mrs. Cornish was widely regarded by her acquaintances as a woman of a visionary and unpractical type, who lived in artistic dreams, and could not trouble to concern herself with mundane affairs. But this was a great mistake. She had a strong sense of the importance of comfort and order and household discipline, even of such details as food and service ; everything in the house was freshly and beautifully kept, the meals generously and tastefully served, all as a matter of course,



with none of the machinery visible, with the well-appointed and tranquil dignity that can only be attained by someone taking a great deal of trouble and earning a willing obedience. She ruled and administered her domestic and family affairs with decision and even sternness. It was not that she appeared in the light of a Mrs. Pardiggle or a Mrs. Proudie, or even as a guardian angel. She did not interfere or censure, or find petty fault; but she had authority and a firmness that could not be questioned. Only occasionally did one become aware by a word, a glance, a silence, that there was a dominant will behind it all, an influence based on dignity and common sense and sincere affection. In the household itself, together with the admiration and affection with which she was regarded was an admixture of wholesome awe. She was peremptory and outspoken on occasions, like the centurion; it was a case of "‘Do this,’ and he doeth it." I do not mean that she was for ever giving orders; but if action had to be taken, her commands zigzagged like lightning, and were promptly obeyed. I do not imagine that she gave her reasons, or used the arts of persuasion. But though her sway was not particularly apparent, for she always seemed at leisure and unconcerned, and ready to give her whole mind to talk and discussion, yet it was clear that someone was in control of the household, and by an exhaustive process it could be inferred that she was ultimately the presiding genius. A small instance may suffice. I went to the Cloisters one summer afternoon to see if the Vice-Provost would come for a bicycle ride. I met Mrs. Cornish and told her my errand. "Frank will go with you," she said. It became clear that



the Vice-Provost had made different arrangements. He was sitting in the garden reading, and had meant to stroll a little beside the river; but he was duly despatched with me, reluctant though consenting. On the other hand, she was not businesslike, nor practical in the ordinary sense of the word. She was excellent at organising anything which touched her imagination; she was, for instance, an admirable directress of fêtes and performances, and a first-rate, even autocratic stage-manager of private theatricals; she kept the smallest details in mind, she was fertile in suggestion, prompt and decisive in action, with a touch of good-natured peremptoriness which could not be questioned; moreover, she had a great gift for improvising expedients to meet an unexpected situation, but not the power of forestalling difficulties or of systematising life. She had no settled method; she took impulsive journeys, often complicated by the fact that Bradshaw was a sealed book to her; and these extemporised excursions sometimes ended in mild disasters; as she wrote once of an expedition which had come to grief: "We then found ourselves expensively far from home, and in a snowstorm." She sent cryptic telegrams, and rearranged plans when it was too late. She lacked the faculty of organising things so that they ran themselves; the orderliness of the man of business played little part in her life. The truth was that she suffered much at times from sensitive and overwrought nerves, and sought relief in sudden activities. This was apparent to few, because she always preserved an untroubled and gallant demeanour, which was both fortifying and cheering to those about her, though it did not correspond with



her inner mood ; in fact her administrative powers, though highly effective on occasions, were of a spasmodic order.

## VIII

She had tragic sorrows in her life, such as the death of her eldest son, a promising young soldier in the Indian Army, and the death of her son-in-law, Reggie Balfour, a young man of singular intellectual power and social charm. But she made no parade of grief ; she was never prostrated or disconsolate. I know that she suffered intensely, but her courage always seemed to rise in serene proportion to the magnitude of a catastrophe. There was never anything helpless about her, nor do I think that she ever depended upon anyone ; and the tenderness she gave, which was great, was not required again ; I think she always disliked sympathy—that she should be offered it was a sign of weakness and made her ashamed. She had many ailments at one time, but I never heard her mention her health, or make it an excuse for any avoidance of duty. For fanciful invalidism or helpless dependence she had a great aversion, and an almost contemptuous impatience of the mutual petting involved in the theory of the ministering angel. Nor, even when Frank Cornish was clearly nearing his end, did she ever permit him to be talked to as an invalid, or encourage him to behave as one ; in this she was wholly Spartan.

I cannot imagine Mrs. Cornish ever going to anyone for advice or counsel, or rather I cannot imagine her following anyone's advice. She kept, I expect, her difficulties to herself, and knew what she intended to do. I remember once being brought into close contact with her in a small matter in which she had



acted precipitately and impulsively, through a misunderstanding, and had created an uncomfortable situation which could easily have been misinterpreted. I was fairly amazed at the breezy good sense and generous indifference which she showed. A few words of explanation, no attempt to justify herself, and that was all. It was just a mishap, and her intentions had obviously been of the kindest ; and it was thus dismissed, never to be thought of again. This secret fund of determination, never paraded or insisted upon, was a big quality in her character, and with it went a complete freedom from egotism. She did not even think of the effect she produced on other people, nor did she ever manifest the least curiosity to know how she was regarded. Together with her strong interest and belief in other people went a complete absence of all inclination for trivial and petty gossip. Indeed, I doubt if she was ever the recipient of such confidences, and the frame of mind which relishes the recital of the weaknesses and absurdities of others, and treasures up manifestations of their faults and failings, as entertaining and possibly even useful, was totally repugnant to her. I suppose she had ambitions for herself as well as for her husband and children ; but she never had a grievance or confessed to a disappointment, nor did she ever console herself by resentful resignation, or pretend that all was for the best. There may well have been moments in her life when she could have yielded to self-pity, or to the natural enough tendency to feel that things had not turned out as well as she had desired and deserved—for it must be remembered that both she and her husband were largely equipped with the qualities that make for conspicuous success in life, solid ability,



pleasant humour, fine unembarrassed manners, quick intuitions, delicate perceptions. But if such temptations ever came, I cannot imagine that she ever indulged them ; they were vulgar beckonings, and of vulgarity Mrs. Cornish had not a trace or a particle in her composition. She hated all intrigue and the pursuit of personal advantages, had, indeed, an almost masculine sense of honour and chivalry, so instinctive and so vital that she credited everyone with the same lofty and disinterested code ; and if there was any defect of sympathy in her it was the defect that comes of not making sufficient allowance for amiable weakness, for looseness of moral and intellectual fibre, while for solemn priggishness or deliberate baseness she would neither have made nor accepted excuses.

## IX

As she grew older, she became more and more majestic. It used to be thought and indeed often said, that Mrs. Cornish had a terrifying, almost a paralysing effect in conversation. She was supposed to intend to mystify, her utterances were regarded as cryptic and oracular, decisions rather than suggestions. You were thought to be fortunate if you could commit the verbal form to memory, but to understand the scope and drift you would have to go away and devote yourself to lonely concentration. "I am afraid she does not think my remarks up to her standard," I have heard an intelligent man say. But all this was an entire misreading of her character. She was critical, certainly, but more by instinct than any technical training ; she had no critical method or apparatus ; and she was intensely kind and sympathetic. Again and again I have seen her take up



the hurried murmurs of some retiring talker, wave the words aloft, and extract a brilliant and wholly unintentional meaning from them. She had her shy moods, though she seldom gave way to them; and had abundant sympathy for the shyness that comes from intelligence and diffidence, though little for the *gaucherie* that springs from undisciplined self-indulgence and lack of perceptive sympathy. But she had great compassion and generous appreciation; and, if she extracted more significance and point from one's remarks than one had proposed to introduce into them, it arose from a genuine attempt to interpret and, if possible, admire her neighbours' contributions to the conversation. She could not readily credit anyone with flatness or *banalité*, and thus took a generous view of the latent possibilities of the most obvious statements.

It is curious that I remember best her incisive sayings—for her humour was as a rule lambent enough, though, indeed, she was epigrammatic and illuminating rather than precisely witty. I never heard her hand on gossip, or retail a jest, though she had a great fund of extraordinarily fresh and interesting reminiscences and anecdotes about men and women of distinction and genius, such as Ruskin, Tennyson, Browning, and George Eliot. Her comments were usually of a subtle and perceptive order, provoking smiles rather than laughter. She could, indeed, sum up a situation with an admirable terseness. Someone, speaking of the work of a well-known savant, said ironically that he had devoted several years to the study of Chinese dynasties. "Chinese dynasties," said Mrs. Cornish with an envious sigh—"how restful, how impartial!"



Again, when one of her daughters was travelling in South Africa, under circumstances of considerable discomfort, Mrs. Cornish advised her to say over to herself, on first awaking in the morning, these three comforting considerations : (1) I'm an Englishwoman. (2) I was born in wedlock. (3) I'm on dry land.

Best of all my talks with her, I remember one at my Sussex home, where she was staying. She was in her gayest and most inconsequent mood ; her entrances and exits had been singularly dramatic. She had made a sudden escape from the drawing-room in what appeared to be the middle of an interesting conversation ; but a little later came in, looking very stately in a black mantilla, and beckoned me out. We walked about the garden and into the orchard with the old dovecot. She walked a little uncertainly, the heels of her shoes sinking deep into the soft grass. She talked on the subject of marriage, in a light-handed fashion. " Men take much too serious a view of marriage—it's just like anything else. Women know this, and men do not. Women don't like reasonable men ; but women are wiser, because they are simpler, and know better than to learn by experience. Learning by experience is only another form of laziness—it means taking fewer risks. . . ." So she talked on in a charming, fantastic mood, but with very good sense behind it all.

One of the best proofs of the salience and vivid force of her personality lies in the fact that when I recall her, I recall her in so many and various moods and guises. As a rule one thinks of friends in two or three characteristic poses ; but Mrs. Cornish had so many attitudes and expressions, that even as I think of her, one is rapidly replaced by another. I



see her majestic and wide-eyed, or again with eyes half-closed, a veiled and dim glance, which meant that her thoughts had migrated and were far away. Or there was a way she had, if one said anything that surprised her, of turning a sudden and swift glance upon one and closing her eyes rapidly several times ; and her movements—sometimes she walked rapidly and decisively with quick, short steps, sometimes she had a hampered, ancient air, like a fairy godmother, sometimes a slow and dignified approach ; but it was never hesitating or uncertain ; she walked and looked as though she *meant* to walk and look just so, for some secret and quite inevitable reason.

## X

I am well aware that this is a very meagre and inadequate account of a character of singular richness and complexity. The complexity, such as it was, was due to a great diversity of gifts and perceptions ; the richness came from the large and magnanimous heart that was the very core of her being. Thus the sense of culture that she gave one was not the petty, fruitless, over-refined culture acquired by sedulous effort for some dull and commonplace ulterior motive ; it was the culture that sprang from being naturally in harmony with things noble and beautiful, and from the glowing curiosity which desires to trace such manifestations back to the deep and remote springs in human nature. Mrs. Cornish lived with a natural ease among the big thoughts and qualities of life, and if sometimes the little things seemed to be taking care of themselves, it was only that she had not time for both. She was entirely loyal, generous, and honourable, and those



qualities never failed her. She loved what was beautiful, but never in an intolerant or covetous fashion. She was a cheerful giver, and hoarded nothing. There was no jealousy or meanness in her spirit. She preferred to rejoice with those that rejoice to weeping with those who weep; her pleasure in another's success was never clouded by envy, nor was her sympathy ever made more emphatic by self-congratulation. She was a very sincere woman; her pretty and transparent diplomacies were the outcome of her genuine kindness. As I think of my friends, I would say of her that I have known no one of so artistic a nature and yet so totally free from the shadow of the artistic temperament. There was nothing morbid about her, for intensely womanly as she was, she had yet a strain of tranquil manliness. I never remember seeing her over-excited or unbalanced, and her enthusiasms were never flourished in the air, but quietly taken for granted. It was a fine, romantic life, and its picturesqueness was natural and not contrived, a native quality, the overflowing of a vivid nature, and neither assumed nor claimed.



## XI

### HENRY JAMES

It was a hot Sunday in the July of 1884, soon after I had taken my degree. I was to go as a Master to Eton in the January following, and I had obtained leave to reside at Cambridge in the interval and to improve my mind. There were but a few undergraduates in residence, and I was enjoying the idyllic liberty of the Long Vacation, when it was possible to read, undistracted by lectures, and to choose one's own amusements. I went to luncheon with Fred Myers, in his fine, secluded house, with its long, ingeniously screened garden. There was always in that house the presence of some influence larger and more graceful than the academic culture, which gave a sense of pleasing mystery and rich associations. That day there were two guests—one a girl of singular beauty and charm, who bewildered me by the contrast between her extreme and delicate youthfulness and the aplomb and finish of her talk. This was Miss Laura Tennant, who was soon to marry Alfred Lyttelton. The other, a small, pale, noticeable man, with a short, pointed beard, and with large, piercingly observant eyes. He was elegantly dressed in a light grey suit, with a frock-coat of the same material, and in the open air he wore a white tall hat. His name was mentioned, and it





HENRY JAMES.

From a portrait by J. S. Sargent, R.A.

Circa 1910.







transported me with delight—Mr. Henry James. I knew some of his books well; indeed, my father had quoted *Roderick Hudson* shortly before in a University sermon—"my ecclesiastical passport," as Henry James said smilingly to me—and he was one of my chief literary heroes. He talked little and epigrammatically. He had not yet acquired, or he did not display, that fine conversational manner of his later years, which I shall try hereafter to describe. The luncheon passed for me in ecstatic pleasure; I was permitted to escort the two to the service at King's, and to give them tea afterwards in my big panelled rooms looking out at the back over lawn and river and immemorial elms. I made two good friends that day—two friendships that never lapsed nor were obliterated. And I recollect a dim consciousness at the time that the attention of Henry James was bent indulgently and benignantly upon me, that he was definitely concerned with me, extracting from me the data, so to speak, of a little personal problem which he deigned to observe. The sense of this was deeply and subtly flattering, combined as it was with a far-reaching sort of goodwill.

He never lost touch with me from that hour. Two or three meetings stand out prominently in my mind at subsequent dates. I lunched with him at De Vere Gardens, and was called for after luncheon by my mother, who came in. When we departed, Henry James, who was wearing a black velvet smoking-jacket, with red frogs, put on his tall hat and came down to the street. He suddenly became aware of his unaccustomed garb at the side of the carriage, and hurriedly retreated to the shelter of the porch, where he stood, waving mute and intricate benedictions



till we drove away. Again, he came to stay with us at Addington on the day after the collapse of one of his plays. He talked, I remember, to my mother and myself with great good-humour of the failure, and went on to speak of his other writing. He said that hitherto he seemed to himself to have been struggling in some dim water-world, bewildered and hampered by the crystal medium, and that he had suddenly got his head above the surface, with a new perspective and an unimpeded vision. This referred, no doubt, to the later style which he developed, 'so wholly different in its complex substance from the clearer and thinner manner of the earlier books. He and my father, on that occasion, found much to say to each other. Indeed it was not long after that date that he presented me with his *Two Magics*, saying that I should at once guess the reason of the gift. I read the book, but could not divine the connection. He then told me that it was on that visit that my father had told him a story which was the germ of that most tragical and even appalling story, *The Turn of the Screw*. My father took a certain interest in psychical matters, but we have never been able to recollect any story that he ever told which could have provided a hint for so grim a subject.

Again, I went once to stay with him at Rye in his stately and beautiful little house. He told me with deprecating courtesy that his mornings were closely engaged; and if I remember rightly, one heard him dictating in an adjoining room to the click of a typewriter; but he paid me short visits to shower down stamps or stationery or cigarettes beside me, to place his hand upon my shoulder, and ask if I was well bestowed. In the afternoons we



walked together, and he even took me, in search of social distraction, to tea at some club or other, where he seemed on very easy terms with his neighbours. On another occasion he came down to dine with me at Eton, when I had a boarding-house. He was to have stayed the night, but he excused himself on the score of illness; and when he appeared, it was obvious that he was suffering: he was very pale, and had a gouty lameness which gave him much discomfort. But he talked energetically, and even came with me into the boys' passages to see two or three boys whose parents he knew. He limped distressfully, but he was full of attention and observation. He commented admiringly on pictures and furniture, he asked the boys whimsical little questions, and heard them with serious discernment. He ought certainly to have been in bed; and I never saw so complete a triumph of courtesy and genuine interest over bodily pain. Latterly, I used to engage myself to dine or lunch in his company at the Athenæum. You would see him enter, serious and grave, with compressed lips—he was clean-shaven in the later years—breasting the air with a decisive and purposeful walk; and then he would catch sight of you, and his eyes and lips would expand in a half-ironical and wholly indulgent smile—his mood was always indulgent. The meal itself was always a curious affair; he would get engaged in talk, look with absent-minded surprise at his food, and then, becoming aware that he was belated, take a few mouthfuls and send his plate away—it was impossible to persuade him to a leisurely consumption. The last time that I saw him he was lunching at the Athenæum, and I went up to him—he had a companion—and said that I



only came for a passing benediction. He put his hand on my arm and said : " My dear Arthur, my mind is so constantly and continuously bent upon you in wonder and goodwill that any change in my attitude could be only the withholding of a perpetual and settled felicitation." He uttered his little determined, triumphant laugh, and I saw him no more.

Such sentences as the above seemed in later days to spring without the least premeditation from his lips. Without premeditation, I say, because they welled up out of a reservoir of fancy, emotion, and language which seemed inexhaustible. But the extreme and almost tantalising charm of his talk lay not only in his quick transitions, his exquisite touches of humour and irony, the width and force of his sympathy, the range of his intelligence, but in the fact that the whole process of his thought, the qualifications, the resumptions, the interlineations, were laid bare. The beautiful sentences, so finished, so deliberate, shaped themselves audibly upon the air. It was like being present at the actual construction of a little palace of thought, of improvised yet perfect design. The manner was not difficult to imitate : the slow accumulation of detail, the widening sweep, the interjection of grotesque and emphatic images, the studied exaggerations ; but what could not be copied was the firmness of the whole conception. He never strayed loosely, as most voluble talkers do, from subject to subject. The *motif* was precisely enunciated, revised, elongated, improved upon, enriched, but it was always, so to speak, strictly contrapuntal. He dealt with the case and nothing but the case ; he completed it, dissected it, rounded it off. It was done with much deliberation, and even with both



repetition and hesitation. But it was not only irresistibly beautiful, it was by far the richest species of intellectual performance that I have ever been privileged to hear. I must frankly confess that while I regard the later books with a reverent admiration for their superb fineness and the concentrated wealth of expression, they are hard work, they require unflagging patience and continuous freshness of apprehension. But his talk had none of this weighted quality. It was not exactly conversation: it was more an impassioned soliloquy; but his tone, his gestures, his sympathetic alertness made instantly and abundantly clear and sparkling, what on a printed page often became, at least to me, tough and coagulated. There was certainly something pontifical about it—not that it was ever solemn or mysterious; but you had the feeling that it was the natural expansiveness of a great mind and a deep emotion, even when his talk played, as it often did, half-lambently and half-incisively, over the characters and temperaments of friends and acquaintances. It was minute, but never trivial; and there was tremendous force in the background. Like the steam-hammer, it could smite and bang an incandescent mass, but it could also crack a walnut or pat an egg. It was perfectly adjusted, delicately controlled.

Then, again, there were his letters. I have myself a large bundle of them; glancing at them, I notice the same sense of growing freedom and controlled exuberance. The earlier ones are serious and a little ceremonious; the epigram melts out, to be replaced by the far finer and deeper gift of metaphor—never simile, but a hidden image tinging the sentence with colour. How liberal he was! A friendly bulletin



would produce a document like a great tapestry, of complex sentences rolling out, parenthesis after parenthesis, yet all dominated and directed. How royal were his compliments! How fertile his encouragement!

“ *Nardi parvus onyx eliciet cadum.* ”

Yet there was often a strict justice in the background, which had its own secret word to say, touching a weak point with a genial emphasis, and never failing to give a sound warning. His letters always had that special note of intimacy, which FitzGerald defines, that they instantly recalled the tones of his voice; indeed, this was the characteristic of all his later writing, that it ever more and more aspired to a conversational utterance. All was conceived from the point of view of unhampered speech. But I do not feel sure that his letters and his talk were not an even higher achievement than his writings, because they were suffused with a sense of definite relation. His sense of relation, his personal interest and affection were so strong, that his writings in their loneliness, their isolation, miss, I think, that added charm of expression. I mean that they did not evoke quite the whole man. In his talk he was perhaps careless of his auditors, but never oblivious of them. He was bent upon satisfying himself, upon completely embodying his thought, but the listeners were there; while, in his letters, the thought of the particular correspondent was always in his mind; so that as the wave of words broke and regathered itself, it was always making for one well-defined point. “ I respond,” as he once wrote to me, “ to the lightest touch of a friendly hand ”; and as I turn through



the letters, year after year, I am almost amazed at the intentness with which he observed, depicted, and glorified the smallest features of the background upon which he saw me, and how largely he interpreted the least hint or gesture of life. He used to write of himself ironically and deprecatingly. He deplores in one of his letters, in reply to a question of mine as to what he was actually doing, his inability ever to say "the egotistical thing," upon doing which "seriously and yet unaffectedly" he declared that the expression of personality depended. "I am trying, in fact," he wrote, "to answer the dear little deadly question of *how to do it*"; and this, he affirmed, constituted the preoccupation of his life.

His letters always carried with them an extraordinary stimulus—the stimulus of one's being so generously realised as a distinct personality. He had a quite clear picture of one's performance and quality, and even of one's purpose, which gave a touch of dignity and aim to the pursuit, however scrambling and impulsive it might be.

He had, moreover, a constant curiosity as to the details of any circumstance or situation. I used to think that you could not please him more than by telling him the whole of a story in which friends or acquaintances were involved. I wrote him once a letter giving some further particulars of a case we had been discussing, and apologised for descending to such minute details. "I don't think," he replied, "that we see anything about our friends unless we see all—so far as in us lies—and there is surely no better care we can take for them than to turn our mind upon them liberally. . . . The virtue of that 'ruder jostle' that you speak of so happily, is that



it shakes out more aspects and involves more impressions."

He always urged upon one the duty of plunging wholly into experiences, not lingering half-heartedly on the edge of them. "If there be a wisdom," he once wrote to me, "in not feeling, to the last throb, the great things that happen to us, it is a wisdom that I shall never either know or esteem. Let your soul live—it's the only life that isn't on the whole a sell."

Complex and delicate as his whole intellectual and emotional nature was, he was yet entirely simple in one respect: in his need for affection. That stands out above any and every impression of him. It was not that he put criticism aside, or that he ever saw his friends' performances and exploits in anything but the clearest light; but he combined with this perfect distinctness of vision a deep craving for simple, sincere, outspoken affection which made him beyond anyone that I have ever known the most loyal and tender of friends. He responded eagerly and ardently to any proffer of friendship; he could not bear to disappoint; and I used to be deeply touched by the way that the smallest message of interest and goodwill would evoke a warm and cordial expression of delight and pleasure. "Yours faithfully and constantly" was a common signature of his; and if one did not see him or hear from him for a time, there was always a sense, on resuming relations, that there was a dedicated space in his mind and heart in which one was securely enshrined. He must have had, I imagine, wide groups and circles of friends who can never have come into contact with each other; but each relation once formed was always quite permanent and distinct. He was thus one of the few persons I have ever known



who really solved that most difficult of all problems—how, namely, to combine the claims of an intellect which was for ever and instantaneously weighing and judging qualities, actions, temperaments, with a freedom and a delicacy almost without parallel, and with the unflinching certainty of touch which accompanies the skilled exercise of psychological diagnosis. Intellectual compromise and condescension were difficult enough to him, and in a general way his judgment of literary conception and craftsmanship was unhesitating and severe. But there was an even further difficulty. His own temperament was so instinctively high-minded, so utterly remote from all spite or jealousy or baser faults, that you would have believed it difficult to him not to be censorious, impossible almost for him to have faced the contact with uglier or coarser motives. But here, I think, his artistic greatness was most clearly revealed. He had the power, only granted to the supreme imaginative artist, of being able to shut off the moral light, to observe, to record, to create, with a relentless fidelity, and not to condemn. There is no sense of partisanship in his written work. He does not take a side, or yield to the pleasure of ruthlessly immersing his baser characters in the consequences of their faults. Take the case of Gilbert Osmond, that supreme and heartless egotist in *The Portrait of a Lady*. The book represents his complete triumph, from his own point of view, over all the finer and gentler characters whom he had pressed into his service. Gilbert Osmond never repents, is never abashed, never humiliated. He holds his own and goes on his way rejoicing, perfectly certain that his view of the world is both just and lofty. Few writers could have resisted the



temptation to turn the tables on him. But Henry James does not give vitality to his villains, if that is not too crude a word to use, by projecting himself, as Robert Browning did, into their reasoning faculties. Henry James is never an impassioned advocate, advancing the baser point of view by means of an intellectual sympathy. He has the passionless insight of Shakespeare ; he does not skilfully present the case of his puppets ; he simply embodies them.

The result of this was that in actual life he could see cruder and even baser natures at work, with astonishment perhaps, but without disgust ; and thus when it came to human relationships, he was able to form natural and simple ties with a tolerance, and indeed with an eagerness, which gave no smallest sense of either condescension or reserved judgment. He only demanded that his friends and acquaintances should show themselves as they were ; and indeed he had a certain kindly relish for situations when his friends, as he called it, "struck the hour"—that is to say, behaved and acted as it was natural to expect them to behave and act. He never felt it to be disloyal to see his friends in the brightest and strongest of lights, and still less did he feel it his business to modify and improve them ; but his loyalty and his faithfulness to a relation once formed were perfect ; and perhaps his only diplomacy consisted in the good-natured avoidance of situations in which his friends should do themselves less than justice.

Indeed, as I remember with pride and gratitude the steady, almost fatherly, kindness he showed me, unruffled by any misunderstanding, any sense of unfulfilled claims, I can only describe him in two words which are lightly used, but which seem to me



to be the ultimate words that can be applied to human character. He was noble, and he was generous—noble in the sense that he gave himself freely and unsparingly, acting instinctively from the finest and freest of motives ; and generous in the way in which he did not resent or mistrust ; he forgave, he condoned, he continued to love. I never doubted his affection, and I was often surprised at the constancy and intentness with which it was lavished upon me.

I have known no artist who was both so absorbed and buried in his work, and who at the same time never failed to recognise the larger and fuller claim of life. Indeed, he seemed entirely absorbed in both art and life alike. As a rule, as the years go on, the dedicated artist retires more and more into the stronghold of art, and bestows upon life his tired and exhausted moods. But Henry James, through some fiery vitality of emotion, contrived, alone of all the men I have ever known, to be continuously equal to the double claim. I have seen him ill, fatigued, melancholy, but never either dreary or listless ; it was always “ a situation ” with which he had to deal : “ You go on talking while I deal with this cup of tea,” I remember his saying—it evoked his energies, and he had his part to play. He never took refuge behind anything, or considered himself to be excused. “ One has to be *equal* to things,” I can hear him say ; and what could be more characteristic than the gay words he spoke to a friend in the first days of his last illness ? He was describing the attack itself : “ ‘ So it’s come at last ’—I said to myself—‘ the distinguished thing ! ’ ” With such high courage, seriousness touched with irony, did he meet the last situation.

My knowledge of Henry James does not entitle me



to speak more completely or authoritatively than I have done. My friendship with him was a long and tranquil affair, intermitted but never interrupted. I never claimed his unique regard, and yet for all that, I felt, as many are feeling, that I had a perfectly secure and definite place in his heart. His picture looks down at me as I write, open-eyed, with the small controlled mouth, as though preparing for some gentle, deliberate utterance. He sits in a carelessly flung attitude, his brow lined by observation and concentration, which all melted so swiftly into that firm, half-questioning, half-caressing look, which seemed to indicate the focussing of all the elements and memories of the friendship, and to say, "Where are you exactly now? Let me see." It was always that, the same tender regard, the same critical appreciation, determined to investigate and add any new development to the old store; and the best of it was, that, though you realised the intellectual solvent, the critical appraisement of what was intimate and personal, at the basis of it all lay a great simplicity which received you open-armed, and loved you for being exactly what you were, and for no more complex reason.









CHARLES FAIRFAX MURRAY.

From a portrait by F. Braun.

Circa 1910.



## XII

### CHARLES FAIRFAX MURRAY

#### I

As a rule, the stuff of life for most of us is homely and monotonous enough, except for such romance and charm as we can ourselves import into it. But occasionally Fortune throws a prize into our lap, unsolicited and unexpected: something strange, bizarre, significant, romantic—call it what you will; a door flies open in what had seemed to be a blank wall, fencing in one's pilgrimage; a figure, inscrutable, inexplicable, appears, walks beside us for a time, to our high entertainment or even bewilderment; then, at a turn in the road, the quaint companion disappears again as suddenly as he came, and is swallowed up in the unknown.

This little record does not pretend to be a formal account of a remarkable man, who was well known to many; I know very little of Fairfax Murray's life except what he told me; but I was brought quite unexpectedly into close contact with him about a particular matter, and when that was over, he showed himself friendly and well-disposed to me for several years; then, owing to circumstances, I lost sight of him again, and our old relations were never resumed, for no particular reason except an absence of proximity; then I heard of his death,



and the door was shut. He interested me greatly ; he was kind, generous, and eminently human ; I dare say there were sides of him which I never saw, for he was a man of moods and mysteries ; so that this is only a personal impression, and not a memory only, for I have revived it by consulting a copious diary. It may not in the least agree with the impressions of others, but that matters little !

In the early years of the present century I was entrusted with the composition of a monograph on Rossetti, in the *English Men of Letters* series. I worked through a quantity of books ; and friends of Rossetti, such as Watts-Dunton—who had, I understood, contemplated writing the life of his friend—showed me extraordinary kindness. W. M. Rossetti, the poet's brother, gave me a long interview and read my proofs. But a friend whom I consulted on the subject told me that the man of all others to pick the brains of was Fairfax Murray. He enclosed me an introduction to him, but added that he was rather a difficult person to get at, and of a somewhat wayward humour ; and that I must not count upon having his approval or assistance. He further told me that he was an accomplished painter, a connoisseur with a wide and profound knowledge of art in many branches, and that he had made a collection of pictures, drawings, manuscripts, rare printed books, and other objects of art, of great magnificence and value ; “ but,” he added, “ he is always changing his treasures, getting rid of one section of his collection, and acquiring another—so that you really hardly ever know what he has got and what he has disposed of.”

I wrote to Fairfax Murray, enclosing my introduc-



tion, and got no reply. The weeks passed and nothing happened. I reluctantly concluded that he would have nothing to say to me. One day, however—it was during the Eton holidays, and I happened to be spending a few days in my house at Eton, where I was then a master—I bicycled up out of curiosity, to London, penetrated the recesses of West Kensington, and with some difficulty, for the numbering of the street, North End Road, was rather eccentric, identified the house. It had an air of mystery. It was one of two quaint old red-brick Queen-Anne houses, side by side, in a rather flashy new suburban region. One of them, I afterwards discovered, had been inhabited by the novelist Richardson. There were high gateposts and iron gates; to the left was a sinister-looking mansion in large grounds, with smoke-stained shrubberies, with high spiked walls, and a secret, shamefaced air. The house I pitched upon as Fairfax Murray's was inconspicuous in front, though it had great charm and dignity. There were some trees, perhaps an acacia, in the tiny strip of garden in front, and a wistaria running riot over the house; the building seemed to run back a great way, and to have a long walled garden attached; while at the far end was a large plain building of modern brick, with a big window, perhaps a studio, with a dust-stained door flush with the street. The whole place with its air of secluded secrecy, swamped and submerged as it was among smug and mean streets, took my fancy very much; but I did not venture to "show face," as Carlyle says. I went away mourning over my lack of success, and on my return found a letter waiting for me, in a finely-shaped, flowing hand, from Fairfax Murray himself, apologising for



the silence and delay, saying that he had been traveling abroad, and that letters had not been forwarded ; and suggesting a choice of dates for me to come to tea with him for a talk.

I accepted with tremulous gratitude ; and a few days later went up to town again. I seem to remember some difficulty about entering ; but I rang a bell, the handle of which was in the street. The door opened ; a trim, elderly housekeeper came down the path, and admitted me.

I was shown into a big, dark, panelled hall, hung with paintings, rather difficult to distinguish in the gloom. She asked me to wait, went on to a door on the left, and announced my name to someone within. . . .

## II

My first great surprise followed : I had expected to see a remote and fastidious connoisseur, solemn and reserved ; but there came out of the inner room a man plainly and rather formally dressed in dark clothes, with a big head, dark, upstanding hair, strong, irregular features, with a pleasant, reassuring smile. His head and shoulders, arms and body, were very robustly developed, but he looked a foot or two shorter than one would have expected ; and as he approached me, I saw that his legs had a great outward curvature—the word bandy-legged only faintly expressed the pronounced nature of this strange deformity—which had, however, nothing either disconcerting or repellent about it, except for the wonder as to how he supported himself at all. At the same time so purely incidental did this physical attribute seem, and so little did it affect the solidity and easy dignity of the man, that one accepted it



instantly as a part of himself, and I think I hardly ever noticed it, or thought of it again.

He had a very hearty, quiet, unaffected manner, which at once put an end to all shyness or embarrassment, and a very pleasant, clear voice.

"Mr. Benson," he said, "what can you have thought of my silence? But I have been moving about, and could not fix my address. In any case I am very glad to see you, and you may be sure that I will give you all the assistance in my power. I am very glad you are to write Rossetti's Life—it ought to be put into shape; of course there has been a lot of stuff printed about him, interesting enough, but scrappy and one-sided. Of course you won't attempt to deal fully with the pictures?"

I said that my book was to be a monograph of Rossetti as a man of letters, but I had thought of having a chapter about the paintings.

"Yes," he said, "on general lines; I can make a few suggestions about that. To-day I will just show you a few pictures, and you would like to glance at some of the MSS. And then, if you will, you can come again, and you might draw up a list of questions you would like to ask. That will set me talking. I know as much about Rossetti's life as anyone, and can throw light on many points. You must follow your own line about the poems—I'm no judge of that—but you know it's an uncommonly difficult and delicate subject! How about Watts-Dunton?"

I said I had seen him and talked to him, and that he had given me a good deal of information, and a benediction as well.

He laughed. "That's all right, then—you couldn't



have done anything without his approval. How about William Rossetti ? ”

I said I had seen him, and that he had showed me many things of interest, and would look at my proofs.

“ Well, you have been lucky,” he said, “ and you have done very well so far. Now come along.”

He took me along a passage opening from the hall, up a flight of stairs, and turned down a corridor leading back to the front of the house. It led to a small square room, once a bedroom. “ Mostly Pre-Raphaelite pictures here,” he said ; “ but I have got such a lot of stuff just now that I have to hang pictures where I can.”

I cannot remember now a quarter of what he showed me. There was the beautiful *Belcolore*, some of the marvellous glowing water-colours in the early manner, portraits of Browning and Swinburne, a picture of Miss Siddal’s, some of Ford Madox Brown’s work—I particularly remember a careful pencil study of “ The Last of England.” He explained to me very carefully and clearly a number of technical points about the early, middle, and later manner, and let me take notes. He brought out an unfinished picture of Rossetti’s, the head completed, and the arms laid in in deep bright blue, which Rossetti thought gave a velvety look to the super-imposed flesh-tints. Then he said that while the light lasted he would like to take me round the house.

It was a strange experience indeed. The house seemed endless, and every inch of it was crammed with framed pictures and studies—an immense quantity of Millais’ in particular. He showed me his bedroom, a long narrow room, the furniture and apparatus simple to austerity, but the walls a literal



mosaic of pictures. I remember here several great studies of Hogarth, of well-known pictures like "The Rake's Progress," in blue chalk, with scrawled additions in red. I said something disparaging about them. "Why do I keep them here?" he said. "I don't know—I suppose because they are the originals." Then we went into a great studio, looking out on the long, mossy-looking, rather desolate garden. I have an impression of big fig-trees and a few shrubs. "I never set foot there," he said, "but it gives one a sense of air." In the studio were some splendid pictures. A great Turner landscape in oils, one of the finest I had ever seen, a splendid Poussin, a bold autumn landscape of Millais', and so forth. He several times asked me what I thought of a picture. I said that I was afraid I knew nothing about art technically. "Never mind that," he said smiling. "I would like to see what sort of a judgment you have got. Come now, what about the Millais?" "Well," I said, "it looks to me somehow rather round the corner." "Yes," he said, "that's not a bad shot—it isn't centred properly; but it's a fine piece of colour." Once he broke off to say, laughing, "But I oughtn't to be catechising a learned scholar like this!"

By this time I felt entirely at home with him. He took me into the inner studio and showed me some work of his own, a copy he was making of Rossetti's "Beata Beatrix," I think. It seemed wonderfully exact. It was here that I had my greatest stroke of luck. He showed me a Rossetti picture, a dance of nymphs, I believe, with a background of woods. "What about that?" he said. I timidly said that I thought the landscape beautiful and the figures



dreadful. He laughed. "Yes," he said, "Rossetti painted that background as a young man, actually in the open air, and never finished it. Then quite late in his time, he wanted money, hauled out the old canvas and stuck the figures in—very poor indeed!" Then pointing again at his own work, he said, "*That's* really my trade, you know. I was an assistant in Rossetti's studio, after being a shop-boy, and did a lot of laying-in for him, and a good deal of copying for Ruskin; but I never could do much on my own account—I have no invention!"

More rooms, more pictures; and the light began to fade. He took me down to the room he had first emerged from, a pleasant, panelled parlour. "This was the Burne-Jones dining-room," he said. "Burne-Jones?" I said in surprise. "Yes, didn't you know?—this was his house; that was his studio at the end of the garden."

He ordered tea, and brought out a mass of Rossetti MSS., among them "The House of Life." "It's all fairly complete," he said—"all his corrections. Here is the original draft of 'Jenny,' there is 'The Portrait.'" The MSS. were bound into volumes,<sup>1</sup> and stuck in among the pages were innumerable scraps—letters, scrawled poems, sketches. I turned them over, and he gave me tea. Presently he got up, took the volumes to a bureau and wrapped them up; then he came back and asked me about my train, sent for a cab, and when finally I rose to go, handed me the packet and said, "There, you had better take all these with you, and study them for yourself at your leisure—let me have them back

<sup>1</sup> These were subsequently given by Fairfax Murray to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



sometime." I was entirely amazed at this, and said, "But you are not going to hand over all these priceless MSS. to a stranger like myself, the first time you have ever seen me?" "Oh yes, I am," he said, "it's all right—you ain't a collector!"

He said good-bye with great cordiality, fixed a day for me to come again, and said, "You have set me thinking about the old days, and I shall find a lot to tell you. Only mind you bring your list of questions: I don't know exactly what you want—I am not a literary cove!"

### III

The next time that I went to see Fairfax Murray I was interested almost as much in his personality as in the personality of Rossetti. I spent a long afternoon with him, but a moment after I arrived, there turned up a well-dressed and somewhat fashionable woman, who had asked his permission to see certain pictures. We all three went up together to the little room, and I was somewhat mystified by his giving her a quantity of entirely erroneous and fanciful explanations of some of the pictures—indeed, he did not hesitate to attribute pictures to quite different artists. She did not stay long, and when she went away, I commented on some of his statements. He laughed, and said, "Oh, she was not a serious student"; then he added, "These visitors who neither know nor care anything about art are a great nuisance—they only want to say they have seen the pictures, and the only thing to do is to fill them up with a little twaddle." "But if they retail your remarks to a connoisseur?" I said. "Oh, it will be supposed to be her mistake, and not mine."



He talked that day a good deal about Rossetti, with an extraordinary loyalty and devotion. "It's no good asking me to criticise him," he said; "I can criticise his art, but not himself. He was such a great man—a man who gave an impression of greatness, of genius, more than any man I have ever seen and of such irresistible generosity and kindness! Of course he went off the lines a good deal, and lost his inspiration; and then he had to make money, and people would only buy what they considered typical pictures; and he had to go on turning out the same sort of thing over and over again. And he got filled with every sort of morbid suspicion; but his look, and his voice—it was like nothing else in the world. Get William Rossetti to read you some of his brother's poetry: his voice has the same sort of cadence as Gabriel Rossetti's—like a ghostly echo of his brother's voice."

To all the questions I asked, he poured out reminiscences. I said something about William Morris. "Yes, he was a strong man, with twice the moral force of Rossetti—and without any morbidity or passionateness—but he hadn't got the universal sort of touch; and he grew almost to hate Rossetti down at Kelmscott: he had the natural dislike of the perfectly healthy man for the unhealthy man."

He told me incidentally that afternoon a great deal about himself, in a very unaffected way. "Some people wonder," he said, "how it comes about that a man like myself, who started without a sixpence, should have got together so big a collection—but the fact is that I have got a natural instinct for detecting artistic quality. It's a gift, and you can't do much in the way of collecting without it, though it improves



with practice ; and I have got an artistic memory—I recognise a particular touch and method, and I don't often make bad mistakes. And if you attend a great many sales, as I do, you get wonderful bargains." He pointed to half a dozen early Gainsborough portraits. "There is a case in point," he said. "They all came up together at Christie's one day. The big men were not buying, and the little men fought shy of them—and they fell to me at about twenty pounds apiece.

"I have always gone on the principle of buying, let us say, twenty things at a sale, and paying for them by selling one, and keeping nineteen. You see, I do things on a big scale nowadays. You remember the Millais landscape, and the other pictures I showed you in the studio the other day ? Well, I found I had about twenty thousand pounds in my account, and I spent it all in one week on pictures. I like changing my things about, but there are some things I get really attached to, and can't part with them. I don't simply want to amass fine things—I really enjoy them. But it isn't an easy life ; I go about all over the Continent, and I have a house near Florence, where some of my best things are."

He went on to tell me some of his adventures. The most interesting that I remember was the story of how he had obtained a fine Andrea del Sarto. Leonardo da Vinci wrote a treatise about Flying—*de Arte Volandi*, I think, it was called. It was a MS. parchment volume, written in Leonardo's curious reversed script, from right to left of the page, with diagrams. Six leaves had been stolen from the MS. by a well-known art-thief, by the simple expedient of shutting into the pages threads dipped in a strong corrosive fluid. At a later visit, when the acid had



eaten through the parchment, the loose leaves, when the custodian was not looking, could be slipped into the pages of a volume the purloiner brought with him for the purpose. Fairfax Murray had tracked the leaves, and just when he was about to make a private offer for them, the thief died in Paris, and his collections were taken to London to be sold.

“I was obliged to hold my tongue about the whole thing,” said Fairfax Murray; “and just before the auction began, I found that the leaves, instead of being kept together, had been put singly into different lots, with a number of items in each, illuminations, engravings, studies, and so forth. The first lot came up, and some unknown purchaser, through an agent, ran it up ahead of me, and I couldn’t afford to go on. So I lost that. But to my surprise, the bidding then ceased, and I got all the other five lots at quite a low price. Then I got into communication with the purchaser, an American, who was not, I found out, after the missing leaves at all. I made an offer. I would give him all the other heaps I had bought, with the exception of the five leaves, for the price I had bought them at—which was a very low price—if he would give me the one missing leaf. He was delighted with the bargain. So there was I with all six leaves for nothing; and then I got an offer from the Italian Government. I declined to sell, but offered to exchange; and so I got the Andrea del Sarto for nothing. Mind,” he added, “that isn’t why I do it; but it is all part of the fun of the thing.”

He told me a further adventure which happened when he was in Italy. Some celebrated work of art had been sold, and smuggled out of Italy. “They suspected me of having had a hand in it, and I had



to attend before a magistrate for examination. Now, I had had nothing whatever to do with the sale or the removal, but I knew exactly how it had gone. It had been taken over the frontier on a mule, concealed in an old wine-keg. Of course, there wasn't a shred of evidence against me, and I said to the magistrate, 'It's no use, sir—I had nothing to do with it, and you are only wasting your time and mine. But I don't bear you any grudge, and I will pay the costs of the prosecuting counsel, who I consider has behaved with great courtesy.' That made a great sensation. The magistrate, with tears in his eyes, thanked the noble-hearted Englishman for his generosity. The costs amounted to about thirty shillings, and I was never bothered again."

He told me a number of other stories, with a child-like relish, and I have seldom been better entertained.

#### IV

He paid me several visits at Cambridge; and I found that he was a man of extraordinary and self-effacing generosity. He gave away his treasures right and left; he made many gifts to the Fitzwilliam Museum, and his only condition was that he should not be publicly thanked, or be offered any mark of distinction. He asked me on one occasion to bring to his house the Director of the Fitzwilliam, then Dr. James, now Provost of Eton, as he had something to show us. As a matter of fact my train was late, and I arrived at the Grange a few minutes after the Director. Fairfax Murray had produced an illuminated MS., worth, if I remember right, about £800, and presented it to Dr. James, and had further gifts in contemplation.



A little later he was my guest at Cambridge. He dined in Hall with me, at the High Table, professing to be very shy, but as a matter of fact he behaved with natural and charming geniality. After dinner, the Master, Dr. Donaldson, asked him in to the Lodge, and showed him a dozen or so interesting pictures, which he had collected at various times. It was a very striking performance. The first picture shown Murray was Rossetti's water-colour, "My Lady Greensleeves." Fairfax Murray uttered a cry of pleasure. "I did not know where that was," he said, "I have never been able to trace it. Rossetti spoilt that picture," he went on. "It used to have a beautiful background of landscape, and a distant hill-town" (I think he said); "but Rossetti, who was sore about some criticisms of his perspective, got it back from the possessor, and painted it all out." Donaldson showed him some early Italian pictures, mentioning the artists to whom they were attributed: "That is said to be a Domenichino, Mr. Murray!" "I'm afraid not, sir! That is by Robert of Ferrara,<sup>1</sup> and a good example." Donaldson looked ruefully at his picture, and went on. "This is said to be a Basso—early Florentine." "No," said Fairfax Murray; "it is by Leporello—a very interesting picture, Sienese. There are twelve known pictures by him, and this is an unknown thirteenth—and in the original frame."

So it went on, and at last Donaldson, himself the frankest of men, said to Fairfax Murray, "But isn't it all a mere matter of conjecture, Mr. Murray?" "By no means," said Fairfax Murray; "it is just a

<sup>1</sup> The names that follow are purely imaginary. I cannot remember them, and no record has been made of them.



question of skilled knowledge." "But how do you know, if I may ask?" "Well, sir," said Fairfax Murray, "if someone showed you a verse of the Greek Testament, you would probably be able to say with considerable certainty who the writer was, and out of what book it came, and what the date was—while I should not have the least idea on the subject. How would you do that?" "Oh, by the Greek it was written in, and the style, and subject-matter—I couldn't explain." "Exactly," said Fairfax Murray. "Now look at this Robert of Ferrara: there's a kneeling monk—he puts that into many of his pictures. There's an archway—that is often repeated. The style is unmistakable—it is just a question of memory and practice."

"Yes, I see," said Donaldson; "but I am afraid you have very much destroyed the value of my poor little collection?" "No, indeed," said Fairfax Murray; "it is worth, to speak plainly, about two-and-a-half times as much as it was before I entered the room!"

The Master laughed, and said, "Well, here is one more test, Mr. Murray. There is a portrait of a lady which belongs to the College—what about that?" "It is an Allan Ramsay," said Fairfax Murray, "and a fine picture. The date is 1798. He used a particular blue in that year, which he discontinued later, thinking it would not last. But you see how well it stands the test of time."

Donaldson laughed loud and long. "You're a magician!" he said. "No, no," said Fairfax Murray, much delighted, "only a very industrious, and I hope a fairly honest man."



## V

I saw him several times after that, at Cambridge, in London, at his own house, always good-natured, indeed with a warm-hearted touch that was something more than friendly, and always on his own line shrewd and interesting. What I liked most about him was his perfect sincerity and naturalness, his entire absence of pose. He did not want to surround himself with mystery, to be pontifical, to make himself out to be somebody. He did not want to glorify his powers of discrimination; and indeed, he was not a critic in the creative sense, he was rather a perfect appraiser. Like William Morris, he could have said, "I am bourgeois; I have not the point of honour." The interest of his position was the interest which belongs to all very successful enterprises, based on a single highly-developed faculty. Apart from that he had one great touch of idealism—his regard for Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite group; and yet his enjoyment and admiration, though very real, were essentially dumb. He could illustrate; he could not analyse. The last time I saw him was in 1907, when I was sickening for a long and serious illness. He spent an afternoon with me; and finding me dull and sad, poured out a string of Pre-Raphaelite recollections, very interesting and vivid; and then I saw him no more, though I heard from him occasionally, and had messages from him, which showed that at all events he held me in friendly remembrance. His figure stands out very firmly and vividly in my memory, perhaps from his very lack of subtlety and his singleness of aim. It was just a happy accident that made the *Life of Rossetti* the bridge that brought



me in contact with so vigorous a personality ; for though his range and faculties had little else in common with William Morris, he resembled him in this, that he knew exactly what he desired and admired, and went straight at his object with supreme decisiveness ; and he had perhaps an even greater tolerance and human kindness than Morris, who apart from his domestic relations, was apt to be impatient with anyone who could not sympathise with him, or at least directly assist him to acquire some knowledge that he needed, or throw light upon some practical end that he had in view. Fairfax Murray had more of Ruskin's generosity, in his desire to share with others the enjoyment he derived from art. I remember his once saying to me, " I don't want to leave a great collection behind me, or a great fortune. I want to provide adequately for my family on simple lines, but I have got more than my share of beautiful things, and I intend to distribute many of them before I die." It was a simple programme, but he carried it out, and instead of using his adroitness to despoil the world, he gratified his generosity by enriching it, and asked for no return.



### XIII

#### STUART ALEXANDER DONALDSON

##### I

THE new masters who arrived periodically at Eton in my early days provided a brief flutter of speculation and interest. Sometimes they were dismissed, like the "egg" in the scale of saleable values, as being just "a beak." Sometimes they were remanded for consideration; occasionally they were unhesitatingly and warmly approved. Of this last class was Stuart Donaldson, when we became aware of a slim young man, with abundance of fair hair brushed back from his forehead, a big blonde moustache, which, strange to say, gave his face a slightly melancholy look, dancing blue eyes, a very frank and friendly smile, and a light, springy step, going gaily and briskly about the place.

He had everything in his favour. He had been captain of his house (Dupuis's) at Eton, in Pop, in the Eton VIII, then at Trinity College, Cambridge, he was a high classic, a noted oar, and a tenor of quite unusual *verve* and tuneableness. He had intended to go to the Bar; but was strongly urged by Dr. Hornby to accept a mastership at Eton, and remained there for thirty years. He plunged at once into the life of the place, though he was not at first allowed to have his say in rowing matters—all that





STUART ALEXANDER DONALDSON.  
Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge.  
From a portrait by John St. Helier Lander.  
1914.







was firmly and decisively kept in Warre's hands ; but he joined the Corps, he interested himself in aquatic matters ; he went everywhere and knew everyone ; he made, breezily and frankly, friends with the upper boys ; and he had too, it may be added, two brothers in the place, both of whom were highly popular and efficient members of the school.

My first vivid recollection of him is on a sultry summer afternoon, when the Sixth Form, in their high and dignified schoolroom, with its Parthenon friezes, its gold-lettered lists of honours, and, not least noticeable, the venerable flogging-block, were struggling through a classical lesson in infinite decorum and patient somnolence. A boy standing up construing in a low tone, and Hornby, a magnificent figure in cap, ample silk gown and cassock, interspersing in his suave and pleasant voice excellent comments and illustrations, to which I fear no particular attention was paid. It was everything that it should be, so far as dignity and seemliness went ; but the proceedings were of a leaden dullness, no questions asked, no vitality obvious.

The room communicated by a door on each side of the Headmaster's chair of state with the Upper School ; and there was evidently no lack of vitality *there*. A Fourth Form division was being instructed just the other side of the door. Brisk questions were being asked, feet were moving about, eager answers were echoing. A momentary lull—and then suddenly a high, cheerful voice, in good-humoured indignation, cried out, “Stand on the form, you booby !” A ripple of amusement went round our solemn ranks, and even Hornby himself put his hand up to his cap, and smiled an indulgent smile.



Stuart Donaldson at that time lived, first with Philip Williams and later on with Edward Lyttelton, in a house in the Cloisters belonging to one of the fellows, Mr. Edward Coleridge, who was only in residence for a month or two in the year, and lent his house to the two young men. There I first made acquaintance with him; we found him gay, good-natured, irresistibly frank and kindly; and as I was at that time a friend of his brother, my contemporary in the school, St. Clair Donaldson, now Bishop of Salisbury, I often went there; his friendliness was a little impersonal, and very impartially given—never the least touch of favouritism about it; and that is a point of which boys heartily approve.

I went off to Cambridge in due course; but coming back as a master in 1885, I found that Donaldson had just succeeded to a boarding-house; after leaving the Cloisters, he had been living with Edward Lyttelton in a queer gabled house by Barnes Pool, long ago a dame's house. It was only a single room deep, and was plastered on, like a swallow's nest, to the intricate back of an adjacent boarding-house; it was full of incredible little rooms, in which boys had once contrived to sleep and eat and live. It was suggested that I should succeed to Donaldson's share of the house—an inestimable advantage to myself; and there with Edward Lyttelton I lived for three happy years.

Donaldson meanwhile had moved to a queer rambling house, with wings like the legs of a starfish, at the corner of Keate's Lane. He was by this time in holy orders; he was very hospitable, very alert and busy; and it was then that I first began to know



him in a more intimate fashion, and to realise his extraordinary straightness, goodness, and honesty, and the transparent beauty of his character. He had a very direct and simple code of duty, honour, and sincerity, and was entirely free from egotism, or any kind of morbid suspicion or jealousy. I can say of him what I can say of very few people, that it was inconceivable that any base, mean, or unworthy thought had ever entered into his mind and heart. But this did not make him either censorious or rigid. He credited everyone with the same innocence and uprightness, unless he had indisputable evidence to the contrary. I have never known so crystal-clear and so unclouded a nature. If it had a defect, it was that he was too unsuspicious and guileless to be a comprehensive judge of character. He was a little too dependent on superficial characteristics. He would trust a boy with an open manner, who did not deserve to be trusted ; and he would think that a boy with sound stuff in him, who was passing through a fidgety, self-conscious, and affected stage, was vain and untrustworthy. I sometimes thought that he did not do timid and diffident boys justice, for he was himself more free from shyness and nervousness than anyone I have ever known. “ It all comes from thinking about yourself,” he would say in his good-humoured and summary way, not realising that the morbid egotism of youth is sometimes little more than a physical malady.

I do not suppose it ever entered into his head to think that he was observed, criticised, or discussed ; and if he had been aware of it, he would not have had any curiosity to know what had been said. I remember Edward Lyttelton telling me that when



Donaldson had just taken orders, in the middle of a school term, at breakfast, he had commented on Donaldson's moustache, which was a very becoming ornament, as being too secular in character. "Yes, I think you are right," said Donaldson, and he promptly went upstairs, shaved it off, and went into chapel, having made himself for the moment almost unrecognisable. Most men would have accomplished this end by slow degrees, gradually reducing the size of the appendage by subtle clippings and snippings, till it became almost inconsiderable; but that was not Donaldson's way.

As to his self-possession and freedom from shyness, it was phenomenal. I don't imagine that he ever entered a strange circle or a big assembly with any of those tremors, those sinkings and vanishings, which afflict even the most confident at times. There was a noted instance of this at a school concert at which he was to take the principal solo tenor part. I may add that he had a natural gift for music of a really remarkable kind, and a perfect ear. He could never read music, and to the end of his life did not even know the signatures of the different keys; but the ups and downs of the notes gave him a general idea of the progression of a melody, and his wonderful instinct did the rest.

On this occasion he had to sing the opening phrase, and to begin on a high prolonged note. The conductor took his place, the orchestra began the overture, Donaldson rose with his book, cheerful, rosy, entirely comfortable, exchanging nods and smiles with his friends. Suddenly, about three bars too early, his voice, clear, bell-like, and of tremendous volume, rose on the air. The orchestra fell into



hideous confusion, faint twiddles and capriccios—and still the note echoed on. The conductor flung up his hands, and then beat loudly on his desk for silence. A hush fell on the room. “Ah,” said Donaldson in an imperturbable tone, and with a pleasant smile, “I see it’s my mistake! I came in too soon. Well, we had better begin again; there’s no harm done!” He was greeted with tremendous applause, bowed his acknowledgments, and the overture began again. I do not think that the incident caused him the least confusion or dismay.

Let me tell a similar tale. I was once with him in the country, and we went together to the opening of a small convalescent home instituted by one of his relations. The Bishop of Reading was pledged to make a speech, and to declare the home open. A considerable crowd had assembled on the lawn in front of the building. At the last moment a telegram arrived from the Bishop to say that he was prevented from attending. A hurried conference of clergy and members of the Committee was held, and a clergyman came up to Donaldson and asked him if he would take the Bishop’s place. “Yes, of course,” said Donaldson, “if that is the best arrangement; but someone must tell me the facts and figures.” This was done, and a small paper of figures was given to him; whereupon he mounted a chair in the middle of the lawn, and made an excellent speech, but the figures having been hurriedly written in pencil were nearly illegible. But Donaldson went gallantly on, “at a cost of seven thousand pounds”—“Seven *hundred*,” said a member of the committee—“Yes, I see,” said Donaldson, “many thanks—at the cost of seven hundred pounds.”



Such inimitable good-humour and unconcern I have never seen.

In these years at Eton he was becoming more and more busy. Dr. Warre, on becoming Headmaster in 1884, had handed over to him the coaching of the Eton VIII, and a little later he took command of the School Corps. But he took his work lightly, and was not given to anxiety. He took great pains with his pupils ; but he was not a very interesting teacher. To be a first-rate teacher, a man needs patience and humour, wide sympathy, discernment of temperament, and a certain dramatic gift ; moreover, a good teacher's mind ought to be freshly supplied, in the case of classics, with a facile kind of culture, literary, illustrations, modern instances—and all these ought to come readily to brain and tongue. But in the first place Donaldson had hardly time for general reading, and his main interest was in theology ; then, too, his own nature being so direct and clearly defined, the subtle differences of temperament were not a matter of great interest to him. He was impatient of delay, and kept perhaps almost too closely to the dry bones of a subject. He was interested in work, conduct, activity. And life was to him so simple and direct an affair, that he was not much concerned with the problems and choices with which the path of more sensitive and inconsistent mortals is strewn. To many people life is more like tracing a path through a forest, with endless opportunities of missing the way ; but with Donaldson it was all in the open, an equable and energetic progress to a clearly discerned goal. He did not understand wayward and complicated characters ; indolence had no meaning for him—he filled every hour with activities ; nor did



he realise what it meant to be willing but weak. His own will was strong, and his sense of right promptly translated itself into action. Boys of a fitful, flagging kind found him peremptory, and even hard, though to a direct appeal for help he was unfailing in his kindness. The boys who really knew and understood him, and who saw that his simplicity hid certain sides of life from him, admired, trusted, and loved him loyally and whole-heartedly ; and no doubt his almost childlike sincerity and goodness had an unconscious effect upon many with whom he hardly came in direct contact.

He was at this time an effective preacher and took great trouble with his sermons ; but his mind did not lend itself to emphasis or epigram. He would expound a subject better than he could sum it up. But it was always impressive to see him going up to the pulpit with a fine unconcern, unconscious of being either observed or criticised, and only intent on saying what he had to say, and without any thought of gaining credit or making an oratorical impression. He did much to quicken and enlarge the religious influences of the place. It was mainly through his influence that the early weekly Celebrations were established, and the evening addresses in preparation for the Holy Sacrament.

In his private life all this time he was very sociable and companionable. He liked a friendly argument, but was impatient of logical subtleties. Like most serious people, his thoughts did not tend to humorous expression ; but he had an intense delight in humorous anecdotes and descriptions, and was one of the most appreciative of listeners, while his high ringing laugh, peal following peal, was one of the most encouraging



and rewarding experiences for a lively talker, and the fact that, as he used to confess, he always forgot anecdotes as soon as they were uttered made him a willing listener to old and familiar stories, of which he never tired.

## II

It was in the winter of 1886 that I first went to stay with Stuart Donaldson at his home, and for nearly thirty years it was almost like a second home to me. His father, Sir Stuart Donaldson, had been premier of New South Wales. He had died, I think, while Stuart was a boy at Eton; and Stuart had watched over his widowed mother with rare unselfishness and devotion. To hear her speak of the comfort and support that he had been to her was a beautiful experience. Lady Donaldson, when I first knew her and to the end of her life, seemed to me the embodiment of the best womanly attributes. She had a very stately and gracious presence, and bore herself with a quiet and unaffected dignity; as I write, I remember the firm clasp of her small hand and her welcoming smile. She had a serene and beautiful face, with large clear eyes, and made even more beautiful by her gentle and serious expression. One felt that she had suffered, but there was no touch of the fretfulness which sorrow often brings. It was rather as though she had achieved a great patience and peacefulness and an increased power of sympathy by what she had endured. She was silent as a rule, but it was not a self-absorbed silence. She had, I think, few intellectual tastes, but lived much in remembrance and affection. She had a great moral decisiveness about her, and a shrewd and tenacious judgment of character; and she could speak her mind on occasions



with a sternness that had no personal resentment about it. She had a most generous and charitable heart, was the best friend and adviser both of her household and all her poorer neighbours, and it was as natural for her to hasten to the help of people in trouble or sorrow as it was for others to defer their visits. And she had too a strong, practical common sense in all worldly matters. It was indeed easy to see whence Stuart had derived the qualities on which his character was based. She had a very simple evangelical faith, and disliked both ritual and symbolism as mere distractions and hindrances. She treated me with a motherly affection, and when she loved she ceased to criticise. Absence and separation from those whom she loved tried her deeply ; but she was never exacting, and indeed encouraged and expected her sons to be occupied and industrious. Altogether she exerted on her whole circle a beautiful tranquillising and uniting influence which no one could gainsay or resist ; and the atmosphere of her house was one of perfect ease and liberty. Her daughter, now Lady Wenlock, was then at home ; full of life and spirit, and with a charming sort of impatience, which harmonised well with Lady Donaldson's equanimity. For many years, too, the sister of Lady Donaldson, Baroness von Brandt, who had lost her husband and son, lived with them, a lively elderly lady, full of mirth and spirit, and with an almost childlike zest for the small adventures of life. But perhaps the most remarkable member of the circle was a certain Miss Adie Browne, of a well-known Irish family, who had come on a visit to the Donaldsons in a time of sorrow and bereavement, and had ended by making her home



there. She was a pale, dark-eyed woman, with a most expressive face, animated, tender, provocative, ironical, compassionate by turns. Sometimes she seemed full of zest and humour, sometimes pessimistic and disdainful, sometimes consumed by unutterable *ennui*, but always spirited and interesting. There was no one like her for creating an atmosphere of animation and gaiety even in the most unpromising companies, and for infusing with a certain irresponsible enjoyment what seemed likely, unassisted, to have proved the dullest and heaviest of gatherings. She had a shrewd and instantaneous perception of character, and was full of delicious prejudices and unjust judgments. But she worshipped sincerity and goodness wherever she saw it. She was always something of a mystery to me, though she became a very close and dear friend ; and I used to speculate in vain what it was that had diverted so fine and generous and idealistic a nature from the effectiveness for which she seemed destined : she had a great capacity for moral indignation against anything mean, spiteful, or cruel. Indeed her sense of the cruelty of the world was a positive torture to her, and carried her to extravagant lengths. The stable was her particular care, but the horses were overfed and underworked ; and a drive for her was a sore trial. She was far from strong, but she would insist on walking both up and down hill, and was distressed when the stalwart horses were urged even into the slowest of trots on the most level of roads ; her dogs were not exactly petted—she had no foolish sentimentality about them—but their appetites were horribly indulged, and their dyspeptic irritabilities unchecked. Yet she was humorously aware of the morbidity of



her view, and never resented its being satirically commented upon.

She had a great gift for spirited and epigrammatic speech. A cousin of hers, a great revivalist, came to stay with them once and announced his intention of delivering an address in the churchyard hard by, just when the congregation were coming out of morning service. "I think you should consider," said Miss Browne, "that you are staying with Lady Donaldson, and that this will be very disagreeable to her!" The revivalist smiled patiently and said, "My dear Adie, when I want advice on such a matter, I shall ask it of a woman of prayer." "I care very little whom you consult," said Miss Browne, "so long as you remember that behaving like a Christian, as I suppose you think you are doing, need not be inconsistent with behaving like a gentleman." The revivalist announced on the Sunday morning that he had decided to abandon the address, after prayerful consideration. "Oh, you may give the process any name you like," said the undaunted Miss Browne.

On another occasion I remember an Eton master of rather boisterous manners coming to the house. When after a somewhat jerky demonstration, he left the room, Miss Browne raised her hands in the air and turned her eyes to heaven, and said, "How strange it is that the only thing that Eton masters seem capable of teaching their pupils is the only thing they do not themselves possess."

She was an accomplished musician. It was a great delight to get her to extemporise on piano or organ, though she would never do it unless pressed. Her accompaniments were wonderful, both in expression and modulation. A hymn used to be sung at morning



prayers, and Miss Browne used to bring out the meaning and mood of the words with an unfailing perception—it used to be a most moving performance.

But best of all was when she could be prevailed upon to sing a song—she had a great repertory—in her deep and thrilling contralto ; I used to feel that she put into it all her most passionate and deepest emotions, feelings which had been somehow thwarted and buried. For she was most reserved about herself. There was never anyone whom I knew so well about whose earlier life I knew so little. I do not exaggerate when I say that I always felt there was a touch of genius about her, untrained and undisciplined, but still unmistakably there.

Sometimes Fred Donaldson, afterwards Sir Frederick Donaldson, who was lost in the same vessel as Lord Kitchener, was there with his wife and children. He was a formidable man, tall, lean, commanding-looking, with a flashing eye, direct and uncompromising in speech, but with a fine generosity and kindness about him, and one of the hardest and most unselfish workers I ever knew.

The youngest boy, Seton, who had all the strength and goodness of his brothers and his mother's sweet-tempered serenity, was drowned in a boating accident at Eton—a tragic loss.

They lived, when I first knew them, in a beautiful old secluded house near Pangbourne called Bere Court. It lay in a valley surrounded by meadows and woods, a home of ancient peace. Inside the house was panelled and tapestried, with dark comfortable rooms—Miss Browne had a passion for dark rooms—and I spent many very happy days there. Stuart had strong sporting tastes, loved riding and



particularly shooting—he was a first-rate shot, till an illness affected his eyesight—and a day in the open air always put him in the highest spirits. He was the best host of a shooting party I ever saw, loud in commendation of any good shooting, and cheerfully unaware of the reverse. Then too the ease and independence of guests was always carefully considered, summer and winter alike. You could read, write, smoke. The ladies seemed always at leisure to stroll or talk; and there was a constant succession of pleasant guests, and the sense that you were not so much entertained as wanted.

In 1889 Stuart had a serious illness, brought on by over-exertion in coaching the Eight on a boiling summer day, followed by an incautious bathe. It was a sudden and severe attack, some obscure lesion in the region of the brain, which affected his eyesight, but neither his physical nor mental powers to any great degree, though he was never secure against the possibility of similar attacks. He hated inactivity, and was very impatient of limitations; but he bore it all with great fortitude and patience, and only once did he tell me what a sore trial to him it had been. He recovered his health by a long journey abroad; and in his absence I had charge of his boarding-house, though indeed it needed little supervising. I was greatly struck, I remember, by the loyalty with which, when he was away, his precepts and wishes were regarded.

He came back full of life and interest, with a beard which did not greatly become him and soon went the way of his moustache. Not long after he moved into one of the biggest boarding-houses, previously Dr. Warre's; and there followed his marriage to



Lady Albinia Hobart-Hampden, of which all that can be said is that it was one of the happiest and truest of unions, and gave him the one thing which he had long needed, a perfectly peaceful and untroubled home background of his own. It evoked all his best qualities, tranquillised his over-restless temperament, and brought into his life the sympathetic influences which a prosperous and active schoolmaster is apt to miss.

His mother had moved to Rosehill, a comfortable and pleasant house, though without the venerable associations of Bere Court, above the Thames near Medmenham. Here, and at a pleasant, irregular old house in Wigtownshire, Dunskey, with two excellent fishing lochs, and a big tract of rough shooting, standing at the head of a wooded glen going down to the sea ; at Humbie, near Edinburgh ; at Aylsham in Norfolk, I shared many happy holiday experiences with the beloved household.

The circle of guests widened and enlarged itself. The Bishop of London, Sir David Hunter-Blair, a Benedictine Father, to whom Dunskey had belonged, Admiral Fremantle, Lord and Lady Glasgow, Bishop Welldon, Sir Herbert Maxwell, and many others, provided an unfailing flow of interesting talk and serious discussion. Stuart, with his easy and unembarrassed geniality, made swift friends with all his neighbours, and in some unconscious way got the best out of them, not by any diplomacy or adaptation, but by sheer and simple friendliness and sincerity. Yet I never saw a host less anxious about his responsibilities, or less affected by uneasy tremors as to whether guests were going to fit in with each other. The best testimony to his power of hospitality is



that they did fit in, not by any scheming, but through the contagious example of a host who spoke his mind without reserve, and took for granted the "bond of peace" which so often is only attained by long use and familiarity. He was always so entirely and healthily himself, that his guests were not afraid to be themselves too.

### III

In 1903 I gave up my Mastership at Eton, in order to edit Queen Victoria's letters. I took a small house at Cambridge, and one day early in 1904, I happened to go into Magdalene, and found the chapel hung with black, the Master, Lord Braybrooke, having just died. The place had a deserted look, but I thought at the time how beautiful and attractive the little college was, with its sheltered and domestic air; with the river on one side of its walls, and with its long, sequestered garden behind. Most beautiful of all was the little inner court, with the quaint Pepysian building, and the screen of tall limes on either side.

I could hardly believe it when I heard, not very much later, that Donaldson had been offered and had accepted the vacant Mastership. It seemed an ideal place for him. His health was now hardly equal to the strain of schoolmastering, though his vigour and activity were great; and this I felt would give him and his wife exactly the right setting. I wrote to congratulate him, and told him that I had just received a letter myself from a friend congratulating me on having been appointed to the Mastership. With very characteristic generosity he replied that the place would have suited me very well, but that



he was afraid he could hardly now withdraw his acceptance !

In the course of the summer I had a walk with him. He had just returned from his first college meeting, and told me all about the position and difficulties of the college. He said that by the Act of Parliament, the college, on the death of Lord Braybrooke, was obliged to elect a new Fellow, and that one difficulty was that the dividends were so low that they could hardly afford to do this. He said that he had been wondering whether there was anyone at Cambridge who would accept what is called a Supernumerary Fellowship, that is to say an unpaid one, and a moment later turned to me with a smile and asked if I would be inclined to accept one, if the Fellows approved. It seemed an almost providential offer. I was faced with the prospect of living at Cambridge unattached to any college, and with no particular duties to perform. Nothing, however, could be done till the next college meeting. In July I was again at Cambridge ; he and his wife came down, and we went over the vacant Lodge, and discussed questions of arrangement and furnishing.

In October I was elected, and went down to be installed, staying with the Donaldsons at the Lodge. He was full of schemes and plans, thoroughly happy in the change of life and work. The college had passed through curious vicissitudes. One very singular fact about its constitution is that the founder of the college, Lord Audley, Lord Chancellor under Henry VIII, reserved the appointment of the Master, not to his descendants, but to the possessor of his great house Audley End, near Saffron Walden. He left no male heirs, and through the marriage of his



daughter to the Earl of Suffolk, son of an attainted Duke of Norfolk, the estate passed to various owners, Earls of Suffolk, Lords Howard de Walden, a Countess of Portsmouth, and finally to a Field-Marshal Griffin, created Lord Braybrooke. The owner of Audley End was also Visitor of the College by statute, and members of the various families had often held the Mastership. Latimer Neville, who was Donaldson's predecessor, a son of Lord Braybrooke, had succeeded to the title and the estate, and was consequently in the strange position of being both Visitor of the College, patron of the Mastership, and Master. In the last century the college had been a stronghold of Evangelicalism, and was also resorted to by the sons of certain old families, with the result that it was rather sharply demarcated into young men of wealth and sporting tastes, keeping hunters and living a life that was anything but studious, and a few scholars of a different type, holding scholarships attached to certain provincial grammar-schools, so that there was no coherence or social unity in the place. Moreover, the college was a comparatively poor one, with only a few small scattered estates, tending to decline in value. Under Lord Braybrooke's Mastership—he was an active, kindly man, greatly respected and liked in Cambridge, and taking a prominent part in University politics—things had improved in many ways, and a considerable *esprit de corps* had been developed ; but when the Boer War broke out, and commissions were offered freely to University candidates, a number of Magdalene men accepted them, and the college was much depleted in numbers. It often happens that an institution is judged more by previous reputation than by present performance ; and though the



element of leisurely undergraduates, who came to Cambridge purely on social grounds, diminished in favour of serious students, it was thought that Magdalene was a sporting and extravagant college; and though it preserved a certain social distinction, there did not seem to be any particular reason for selecting it as a place of education. When Donaldson succeeded, there were hardly forty undergraduates, none of whom were of the old-fashioned type; and many of the sets of rooms in the college were vacant, in spite of the fact that the small staff were both efficient and distinguished.

The appointment of Donaldson, made by the present Lord Braybrooke after careful enquiry and consideration, approved itself from the first; and indeed no better appointment could have been made. The new Head was known as an active and energetic schoolmaster, with strong athletic sympathies; and he was, moreover, deeply interested in religious and philanthropic movements, social work, missions, temperance. He was a man of means, genial, hospitable, generous, of attractive presence and manners, with no fads or fancies, but an admirable exponent of the most wholesome and manly virtues; while his wife was no less conspicuous for her kindly humour, quiet aplomb, and vigorous common sense.

The college began at once to increase in numbers, and both Donaldson and his wife devoted to it their best energies. I came into residence there in 1905, and settled in college, and I was much struck with the moderation and good sense with which he was managing the affairs of the place. He had formed in his mind, before entering on his duties, a scheme of rigorous and almost over-accentuated discipline—the



natural bias of the successful schoolmaster—but he pressed nothing unduly, and very soon realised that the essence of college life depends upon keeping discipline in the background as far as possible, so long as it is known to be ultimately there, avoiding petty interference and fussy regulations, carefully providing for the reasonable comfort of all undergraduates, guarding the liberty of individuals in the matter of economy and simplicity, relying on their honour and tolerance and common sense, not restraining idealistic and altruistic motives, while keeping as far as possible the tone and standard of life pure and high, influencing the society, and encouraging an *esprit de corps*, but never losing sight of or sacrificing the individual.

All this he did, not so much deliberately as instinctively, by virtue of a substantial tact and a knack of honest compromise, which lay beneath his sometimes over-frank expressions of opinion, and the candour which occasionally underrated the sensitiveness and resentfulness of others from which he was himself so wholly free. The defect of natures of real and vital sincerity is that they overlook the morbid element which lies in the background of many otherwise wholesome and effective temperaments. But Donaldson had this immense advantage, that though he might sometimes unwittingly cause offence, he never either wittingly or unwittingly took offence; while if he became aware that he had caused it, his generous and cordial apology at once brought about, not a grudging reconciliation, but a loyal recognition of his unfailing charity. He had his preferences and prejudices of course, and perhaps his moments of secret annoyance when opposition to his ardent



schemes arose. But he was the least secretive and morbid of men ; he did not hug a grievance, he simply trampled it down and went on his way.

Of course the Head of a college, unlike the Headmaster of a school, has no supremacy of authority except what he can create for himself. A college is an oligarchy, and every member of a College Council has his vote—no coercion or ignoring of views is possible. Donaldson fell in with all this very easily. He made an excellent chairman, though there were occasional breezes. The only thing which he frankly confessed he could not grapple with were questions of finance ; but fortunately finance is one of the things which has a peculiar fascination for the average mind—almost the only notes taken by members of Boards and Councils are statements of pounds, shillings, and pence, sedulously copied down and never again referred to ; and the finances of the college were in excellent hands. Neither has the Master the administration of ordinary discipline—that belongs to the Tutor. The only disciplinary function which he took upon himself was the office of Dean, which made him, with the Chaplain, responsible for the conduct of the chapel services. As far as the services went, the result was excellent, though he was not very open to suggestions ; he used to say laughingly that it was impossible to please everyone, and that he must just do what he thought right. His reading in chapel was clear, reverent and moving ; he presided at choir practices and encouraged musical accessories. He was seldom if ever absent from a chapel service. But the disciplinary side of the matter, that of enforcing attendance, or rather of encouraging it, was a more delicate matter. Compulsory attendance was



rapidly becoming a thing of the past. There is an old Cambridge story of a don, a rigid precisian, who said to Bishop Thirlwall that religious observance was on the wane, and that it was necessary to choose between compulsory religion or none at all. "I confess," said Thirlwall, "that I do not perceive the exact difference!" Donaldson used to say that he never enforced attendance by inflicting penalties; but he argued the question with undergraduates who did not attend with the same breezy candour that he would have argued it with a contemporary. It escaped him that it was not decorous or natural for the undergraduates to employ the same frankness, and the result was that some of the men put in an attendance because they respected Donaldson and preferred to stand well with him, and dreaded his moral suasion even more than they would have resented a direct penalty, though they remained unconvinced of the obligation, its advantages and privileges. I have myself been present at some of these interviews, and though I did not consider the process a very edifying one, yet nothing ever revealed to me more plainly how utterly unconscious he was of the prestige of his office, or of the awe that his position inspired.

He saw a great deal of the undergraduates, had them constantly to his house, went to see them when they were ill, supported all their projects, took an unfailing interest in their athletic performances. His difficulty was, as he often admitted with a humorous regretfulness, that he had no small talk. It was in a sense true. With his contemporaries and colleagues he was full of discussions and plans and projects; what in others would have been day-dreams



and visionary reveries in him were definite and practical considerations ; but he had no fund of anecdotes ; and though he took a lively interest in politics and social movements, he could not blandly expound them, or interpret and augment halting suggestions. He could argue points with tenacity and eager partisanship, for he always took a side ; but he could not ever divest himself of a sense of equal comradeship, or realise what shyness meant, or see that speechlessness did not necessarily mean an absence of knowledge or conviction. But as time went on, the undergraduates came to understand him better, were agreeably surprised by a bluntness that was never discourteous, and amused by his lack of caution and calculation. Moreover, both they and his colleagues recognised and came to depend upon his unfailing courage. They knew that if any question of right and wrong, of honour and dishonour, of truth or deceit arose, he was a man who would plainly and passionately, without any thought of consequences, speak his mind and act accordingly. He could in fact be wholly and entirely depended upon. He might be over-zealous or hasty or peremptory, but he never turned his back upon any danger or difficulty or unpleasant duty, or made any compromise whatever with anything base or mean or injurious for the sake of public convenience or private tranquillity ; and whatever his own prejudices were, he was consistently generous and impartially just. He did not take any very great part in University business of a general kind, and perhaps his frank avowal of his incapacity for financial business stood in his way ; for when the time came for him to succeed to the Vice-Chancellorship, an opposition arose. It



was thought that he had entered rather late on University life, that his interest lay chiefly in his college duties and outside philanthropies, and that he had hardly had enough experience of University problems and needs. At any rate, he was passed over, in favour of a Head who had high qualifications and a far longer apprenticeship. The college made a strenuous protest, and conservative opinion declared in its favour. At the next vacancy he was nominated. The fact that he had been passed over was felt by him very deeply. He did not quite allow for the genuineness of the belief, which prevailed in certain quarters, that he was not as yet fully qualified by experience for what is a hard and complex post. What he did feel was that he had come as a stranger to a college at a low ebb in its fortunes, and had raised it into a flourishing and prosperous condition. But he bore what a less generous and wholesome-minded man might easily have regarded as a personal affront, with great gallantry and equanimity, and never for a moment relaxed his energies or his apparent cheerfulness.

## IV

It was expected, as I have said, that Donaldson would not find the Vice-Chancellorship congenial. It is a difficult post, demanding self-possession, good-humour, quick decision, readiness, a rapid grasp of various and not very interesting business, dignity and punctuality. The number of small details referred to the Vice-Chancellor is endless, and must be dealt with promptly and tactfully. He has to be ready to make speeches on any occasion, about matters with which he is possibly hardly acquainted. He has to receive distinguished persons and undis-



tinguished persons alike with ease and courtesy. He has to preside over innumerable Syndicates and committees, without any previous experience of the matters they regulate. At the same time there is always a possibility that the Vice-Chancellor may have to act promptly and tactfully in a disciplinary crisis, and thus the sense of responsibility is heavy. There are long hours of formal ritual to be worked through. The ideal Vice-Chancellor is a sensible, businesslike, genial man, who enjoys details, likes public appearances, is given to hospitality, has unbroken health, needs little exercise, and has an epigrammatic turn of speech.

In many respects Donaldson was very well qualified; but his grasp of business and details was not very great, and his health was not very robust.

But as a matter of fact he was admittedly a conspicuous success. He was so natural and self-possessed that, with the assistance of a wife of great social gifts and infinite kindness, he made an admirable host, never fussy or in a hurry, always perfectly natural and tranquil. Then he proved an excellent chairman, leaving the more intricate business to experts, delegating the right things to the right people, and careful to see that everyone had his say. He proved moreover a ready speaker, wisely confining himself to tactful generalities. His engagements were punctually kept, his correspondence was promptly dealt with. The fact was that with his appetite for work, he enjoyed it thoroughly, and instead of being afflicted with a sense of dragging responsibilities and anxious forecasts, he took it all very lightly, and lived in the day and for the day. I do not think I ever saw him so happy or in such



high spirits as in the early days of his Vice-Chancellorship.

But what at last failed was his health. . It became gradually clear that the constant strain was too much for him. Towards the end of his first year of office it was clear that he was attempting too much. He tried the effect of a thorough rest and change in the Long Vacation, and looked hopefully forward to a second year of office ; but on returning to Cambridge for the Michaelmas term, he was obliged to consult his doctors, and was told that he must resign without delay.

He did so, and the news was received with universal regret. To himself it came as a very deep disappointment. It was not only that he was naturally pleased at having so signally falsified the prediction of adverse critics ; but the work itself had given him a new range of interests and a sense of unusual vigour and enjoyment.

He made no secret of his regret ; but he met it gallantly and courageously, as he always did, and threw himself vigorously into the work of the college ; and never I think did he show himself more considerate of others or take a more active interest in all that was going on in Magdalene than at a time when he was enduring what was the greatest trial of his life.

In the following year the war broke out ; the college emptied rapidly. The General and Staff of the Fifth Division were quartered in the college. Donaldson felt the misery and unhappiness of the war most acutely, and his own enforced inactivity even more. If he had been a younger and stronger man, he would have undoubtedly gone to the front as a chaplain. As it was, he did all he could for the



comfort and happiness of our military guests, threw himself into every scheme and project for helping things along. But the disastrous early days of the war had an obvious and grievous effect upon him. He always spoke in public hopefully and optimistically ; but I can never forget how I met him one day just outside my door. He shook his head with a very downcast look, and said that he felt that he could not bear the anxiety and sorrow of the time. He looked and spoke like a man in torture ; but he never flagged in his efforts to render what help he could in any direction.

All through that year and the next the strain went on ; but his courage and faith came back to him ; and when I saw him at the beginning of the Michaelmas term in 1915 he seemed to me to have recovered much of his old hopefulness.

In the early morning of Sunday, October 24, he celebrated as was his wont in the college chapel, and I was told by one who saw him just before the service, that there was a peculiar radiance and brightness of aspect about him, and an entire tranquillity of manner. But when he rose to begin the service, his voice suddenly failed, and he fell to the ground unconscious with a stroke of paralysis. For four days he lingered, sometimes unconscious and scarcely able to speak, but at other times recognising those who came and went with his old natural smile. A real hope of his recovery was felt, but a second stroke supervened, and soon all was over.

The career which I have briefly traced needs little comment or interpretation, because from first to last it was the unaffected expression of his own frank and eager temperament. He was not a man of fluctuating



moods, his spirits were naturally high and equable, but he did not, as some exuberantly cheerful spirits do, call upon those about him to admire and contribute to his own enjoyment. It was just the other way ; he shared happiness and did not claim it. On the other hand, his life, which began so prosperously and brightly, was overshadowed by severe trials and anxious experiences. But these he bore with singular patience and fortitude ; he seldom, except in moments of extreme dejection, spoke of them at all, and then only in the simplest words, free from all self-pity and morbidity. He stood the test nobly ; for he seemed marked out for conspicuous success and high influence ; yet, fine in quality and faithful in diligence as his life was, his health prevented him from gratifying natural and laudable ambitions.

It was a beautiful and generous nature, made on the simplest and freest lines. He was wholly unconscious of his fine instinctive principles, and the purity and crystalline sincerity of his mind.

It was a triumph of goodness, neither overbearing in prosperity nor timorous in adversity ; the happiness which he enjoyed, for he was essentially a happy man, was fully earned and deserved. He had thought very little of securing his own happiness and had spent himself in the service of others. He had chosen and held to the one thing that is needful ; the one thing that survives, and cannot be taken away.



## XIV

J. D. BOURCHIER

THE CHAMPION OF BULGARIA

A RECENT issue of Bulgarian stamps bears for effigy a remarkably faithful likeness of an Irishman, the late Mr. J. D. Bourchier. It is a strange and, I should imagine, almost unique compliment for a nation to pay to a foreigner. So public an honour, so grateful a regard, would, one would suppose, be jealously restricted by any community to native patriots and heroes; and it becomes an even more romantic and surprising affair, if the facts are baldly stated, that Mr. Bourchier was an Irishman of brilliant classical attainments, who, after a brief tenure of a mastership at Eton, to which position his best friends would admit that he was almost conspicuously unsuited, became a journalist, and a special correspondent of *The Times*.

Bourchier was a colleague of mine at Eton. I knew him well, and was often in his company, and had, as I think all who knew him at all intimately had, a very affectionate regard for him. It is hard to say exactly where the charm lay, but there was something childlike and appealing about him, a transparent sincerity and a genial sort of combativeness; added to this, a clear intellectual grip, with a strong sense of proportion, a marked gift of style and expression,





*Universal Photo Press.*

J. D. BOURCHIER.

In Bulgarian Dress.

Circa 1910.







and at the back of all a Celtic power of holding and pursuing with unshaken tenacity a generous and apparently unrealisable ideal.

Bourchier was the son of an Irish landowner, and was Scholar and Classical Gold Medallist of Trinity College, Dublin. Then he migrated to Cambridge, took a scholarship at King's, and won a distinguished place in the Classical Tripos. He was appointed a master at Eton by Dr. Hornby in the late seventies. I was then a boy in the school, fairly high up, and I must confess that the new arrival filled us with amusement—by no means ill-natured amusement, but containing that spice of compassionate depreciation which bigger boys feel for a master who obviously does not know how to preserve discipline among the young rascals of the Fourth Form.

He was in those days slim and active, with light hair and blue eyes, and a sanguine, open-air sort of complexion. He dressed with a fanciful precision. I remember a blue morning coat which had been the fashion twenty years before. He walked rapidly, with short and somewhat mincing steps. He was always kindly and courteous, his manners were both natural and pleasantly deferential, and he was so guileless that it was singularly easy to mislead him ; his temper was quick but very placable. He had a winning smile and a very infectious, rather shrill laugh, a rich high baritone voice of a pleasing softness, but capable of much emphasis, and not altogether free from an agreeable touch of brogue. And then he had a fund of humorous geniality which, on closer acquaintance, proved that he was a good fellow, even though he might not be much of a disciplinarian ; and, lastly, he was unmistakably and obviously a



gentleman, with a keen sense of honour, and free from all pretentiousness and uneasy suspicions.

He was singularly absent-minded and forgetful; and it used to be said at one time that if any master failed to appear to call "absence" in school yard, the boys, who were by prescriptive right allowed to depart after waiting five minutes, were always so certain that Bouchier was the offender, that they invariably went to the house in which he lodged on the Slough road, and raised a congratulatory cheer under his windows.

When I went back to Eton in 1885 under Dr. Warre, I did not find that things had mended. Bouchier had become very deaf, and teaching, which had never been congenial to him, had become positively irksome. It was then that I first made real acquaintance with him, and discovered what a delightful companion he could be. He was fond of bicycling, in the days of the old high bicycle, and enjoyed scouring the pleasant woodland country to the north of Eton, about Beaconsfield and Burnham Beeches; more than once we penetrated, flagrant trespassers, to the heronry at Black Park, heard the strange grunts and clangs of the nesting birds, and even bathed in the dark lake among the pines. He was an easy and discursive talker, full of accurate and concise information, with an agreeable humour, and a shrewd but always friendly appreciation of his colleagues' foibles.

It was then, I believe, that he first tried his hand at original writing. He put together with infinite leisureliness and fastidious care a little paper about Beaconsfield and its associations, which ultimately appeared, I think, in *Macmillan's Magazine*. He had



a fervent interest in politics and social questions, and used at times to expand into eloquent tirades : and I became gradually aware what a supple and well-filled mind he had, though he was not interested so much in literary effects or imaginative romance, as in definite, tangible things, which could be attained or modified by practical measures ; but I knew and cared little about such matters in those days, and our talk was mostly about current events and daily concerns.

Bourchier at this time took very little part in the social life of the school. He played no games, except for a fitful and inefficient appearance in the football field, and never went to watch them. He had few pupils, and did not know many of the boys ; he occasionally dined out, and was then seen at his very best ; for he had no desire to lead the conversation, and was always ready to talk with eager interest and companionable sympathy about any subject that might be started. His deafness led to curious misunderstandings and inconsequent replies, and no one was more amused than himself by the resulting absurdities.

He was a keen musician and had a strong and flexible voice. I shall never forget one Sunday evening when the musical society were practising a Handelian oratorio under the genial direction of Sir Joseph Barnby, and it was discovered that there was a dearth of tenors—indeed, that the only two possible vocalists for that part were Bourchier and a boy who is now an eminent member of the House of Lords. They were invited to sit together on the left of the room and sustain the part as manfully as possible. They shared a book, and we soon after



embarked upon a difficult chorus in which at one place there is a long and elaborate run for the tenors, high in compass and rapid in tempo. The sopranos got into trouble and came to a stop. The altos collapsed, and then the basses followed suit; but the two tenors had got absorbed in their performance, and prolonged their duet higher and higher, louder and louder, while Sir Joseph Barnby, with an inimitable gesture to the rest of the choir, as if to entreat silence, continued to accompany the rising strain till it reached its climax, when an irrepressible burst of laughter and applause greeted the solitary performers; to which token of admiration Bouchier, delighted by the mishap, replied by a low and gracious bow.

He was always reticent about himself and his antecedents—he had a strict code in these directions, and would have thought it ill-bred to converse much about his private concerns—but I gathered that his father had been an Irish squire with a large and not very productive property, and that his own private means were small and by no means secure; and then as I came to know him better I realised in how precarious a position he felt himself to be. His deafness was increasing upon him, and it was clear that he could not hope to be a teacher for very long; he told me that he thought of resigning his post, but that he was very anxious to get some sort of literary or journalistic work, so that if one profession failed him, he might have another to turn to with some hope of success. At this time he was often in a depressed mood, natural enough in a man conscious of marked abilities and yet unable to use them to any effect. But he had too a great power of throwing



off depression and discerning rosy prospects ahead, and an almost Micawber-like gift of believing confidently and with unimpaired dignity that something would almost certainly turn up.

But he had not, except for an occasional article or paper in a magazine, arrived at any definite position either in literature or journalism, when in 1888 the fiat went forth ; and I think it was one of the most fortunate things that ever befell him. Had it not been for his rapidly increasing deafness, he would have probably ended his days as an unsuccessful schoolmaster. At the time he felt it deeply, and I well remember the gloomy outlook which he prognosticated when he told me the news. To make things easier for him, a small pension was granted him for a short term of years ; and so he put together his scanty belongings and his few books—he was not a man who ever acquired much solid property—and drifted away from Eton into the world.

I do not know how he got his first opening in journalism, but if I recollect rightly, he told me at a later date that one of his earliest commissions was to write some articles on the subject of a Greek loan. It was tantalising, I remember his smilingly saying, to know what effect on the money market the articles would produce, and singular to realise that if he could have speculated, he could have made a handsome sum of money. But this was the sort of performance which would not ever have come to Bouchier in the light of a temptation, any more than he would have been inclined to tell a story, however paltry, to anyone's discredit. He had a higher standard in these matters, or rather a higher instinct than most men. How he worked up his



material, I hardly know, for he had no great taste for finance in any form ; but he had a most serviceable power of getting up an uncongenial subject, of going to the right people, and of taking infinite pains about it ; the articles were straightforward, direct, and lucid : and it was soon after this that he was made a regular correspondent of *The Times* in the Balkan provinces and Greece ; and not long after that he became chief correspondent for South-eastern Europe, with his headquarters at Sofia, and a considerable income. I remember his telling me on one of his visits to Eton of his strained relations with the correspondent whom he succeeded, and how little confidence he had in his methods.

This is only a personal sketch ; and I naturally know little of his own methods, or how he won so completely and entirely the respect and confidence of the Bulgarians, except for a few scattered remarks which from time to time I heard him make. One statement of his emerges very distinctly from my memories. He said that of course, hampered as he was by deafness, he had not got the power of picking up in clubs and places of public resort what Carlyle called “the purport of the world’s babblement.” But he said that he read papers and journals very carefully—among his gifts was the power of mastering a new language very thoroughly and familiarly—and if he became aware that anything of importance, either directly or indirectly bearing upon Balkan problems, had occurred, “why then,” he said, “I walk straight off to the highest-placed expert that I know—the Premier, the Foreign Secretary, the Commander-in-Chief—send in my card,” adding, with a complacent smile, “and I may say that I am never



kept waiting—and thrash the subject out with them until I thoroughly grasp it. It is their business to make me hear, and it is to their interest to make me understand!" Indeed, it was humorously said that his deafness was the reason why he was so often entertained by eminent politicians at picnics and country expeditions, because they never felt really secure in communicating political secrets to Bouchier except in the trustworthy solitude of the open air. And then he went on to say that as a matter of fact he was by that time on such intimate and friendly terms with most of the leading public men that there was very seldom any friction. "But," he went on, "the essence of the position is that I form my own opinion and make my own comments. I am not dictated to, and I do not merely repeat what they would wish me to repeat." Indeed, his criticism of men and affairs was so frank and fearless, and often so unexpected, that it aroused at times a fierce resentment, which, however, he generally contrived to allay.

Of course it is clear that the real essence of his success was his personality. His lack of success in England was partly, I believe, due to the superficial touch of eccentricity and even absurdity in his demeanour—an absurdity which I think he rather relished than otherwise. It was easy to laugh at him, and not to perceive the essential soundness of the man behind. He was not according to standard; it was not so much that he was unconventional, as that his conventionality was somewhat *bizarre*. His courtesy had something old-fashioned and elaborate about it; the air with which he entered a room, his hands clasped together and his head inclined, smacked



of the eighteenth century. But all this would not be perceived in Eastern Europe, where Bouchier was probably only thought to differ from other Englishmen in having finer manners. But what really conciliated and attracted was his bonhomie, his ingenuousness, his endless good-nature; he was so transparently undiplomatic, so wholly unsecretive; and to find all this in a man who wielded such a far-reaching influence and had so much power at his beck and call—this to a small and ambitious nation was highly captivating; and best of all was the deep and sincere admiration and respect which he increasingly felt for the Bulgarian character and *moral*. He regarded them as a noble and generous race, untainted by Western luxury and Oriental duplicity, simple, primitive, patriarchal, and heroic. This estimate became more and more pronounced as the years went on, till he was looked upon as the one foreigner who really understood Bulgaria, and sympathised with her national aspirations. Undoubtedly the heaviest blow that his hopes and energies ever received was when Bulgaria decided to throw in her lot with Germany in the war.

But I am somewhat anticipating. This position was not gained in a week or a year. My next remembered sight of him after he left Eton was when he came back at the time when he was made head correspondent for Eastern Europe. He looked exactly the same, except that his carefully arranged hair was rather thinner, and his face a little more keen and worn. But there was the undefinable radiance of success about him, and the despondent air that he had latterly worn was exchanged for a happy geniality, perfectly unaffected, an even more accen-



tuated deference, and an expansive consideration. He had left Eton a failure, and he came back a pronounced and conspicuous success, with his finger on the pulse of the world. He was buoyant and effervescent; he talked, laughed, went smilingly about, and even the fur coat that he wore, little as it suited him, had an air of distinction.

A few years later I met him at a Scotch country-house, and again the change was marked. He had then so solid a position and so real a status that he evidently took it all for granted and made no more comparisons. He was neither elated nor condescending; he was simply perfectly natural. There, I remember, he caused a great deal of innocent amusement. He was fond of shooting, and a very poor performer. He fired at everything, even at the blackbirds that rose out of the edges of turnip-fields, and when told that it was a blackbird he had missed, he would say indifferently, "Well, we should call that a snipe in Bulgaria!" If we were instructed to spare hen-pheasants, and he was loudly warned that the bird coming over him was a hen, he would say "What, what?" and fire off both barrels; but he did very little execution in any case; and at times he talked so persistently and briskly that he would be sent ahead with the keeper to act as a stop.

But he was very interesting. He did not overwhelm the party with Bulgarian reminiscences, but if he was questioned he talked trenchantly and concisely, and with excellent touches of personal interest; and one became aware that Bulgaria had become in every sense his home.

Some of the outstanding points of his career may



here be mentioned. After the first Balkan war he played a leading part in the negotiations which preceded the creation of the Balkan League, and his influence was effectively exerted during the peace conference between Turkey and Bulgaria. Moreover, it was he who first brought about an understanding between Bulgaria and Greece. In 1895 he investigated the atrocities in Macedonia and prepared an admirable report for the use of the British Government. In 1896 he was largely instrumental in promoting the amicable arrangement between Crete and Turkey in that year, and received the thanks of the Cretan Assembly. He played, too, a very important part in helping to bring about the ultimate union between Crete and Greece. In 1898 he accompanied the Emperor William's pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and proved a perceptive and picturesque narrator. He held the crosses of half a dozen foreign orders, from Greece, Bulgaria, Rumania, and Montenegro. He wrote many articles on Eastern affairs in the monthlies, and made several important contributions on Bulgaria, Crete, Macedonia, and Albania to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. He was deeply interested in the progress of excavation both in Greece and in Crete, and followed the discoveries made with scholarly enthusiasm. His time was filled, but always in a leisurely manner; it was impossible to think of Bouchier doing anything in haste.

The Bulgarian nation, whatever political and national animosities their policy may have aroused, have always had a singular power of awakening enthusiasm in Western individuals. They are a non-Aryan race, and while profoundly affected by Western and Christian ideals, they have remained essentially



outside the European tradition. And thus they have possessed the attractive quality of a marked and unconventional freshness, which appeals to sophisticated minds like that of a wild-flower springing up in the midst of an elaborate parterre.

Bourchier succeeded in being the one entirely reliable interpreter to the West of the national genius of Bulgaria. In the Balkans, political relations and impulses shift and change with amazing rapidity ; there is no settled tradition ; the allies of one war are the enemies of the next. But Bourchier was extraordinarily loyal and single-minded in the matter, and never failed to support the Bulgarians in all adversities and vicissitudes, and to emphasise their undeniable virtues in the best possible light, before a public which always sympathises with a small and in many ways distinguished nationality, struggling gallantly against every kind of local and political disadvantage. He championed them in turn against Russian and against Austrian patronage, just as he had stood out against Turkish tyranny, and as he combated at a later date the pressure exerted by both Greece and Serbia.

And then he was a perfectly honest man. Anyone who knew the personal factors of the situation could discount his ultra-idealisation of his favourite nation ; and his despatches could always be relied upon, as containing the confidential aspirations of Bulgarian statesmen, far more intimately and frankly expressed than they would ever have been to diplomatists.

When the war broke out, he was obliged to retire to Bucharest ; but even so, his information had a quality of veracity and authenticity that could never



be gainsaid ; and in the course of the war, owing to the degree to which he had earned and retained the affectionate confidence of the nation he had, so to speak, adopted, combined with his own transparent sincerity, he was able to present probably a more completely faithful picture of the attitude of Bulgaria than any diplomatist or correspondent could give of any nation suffering from the shock of actual events, and distracted by the anxious consideration of future possibilities.

The last time that I saw Bouchier was 'only a few months before his death. He was shown into my study at Cambridge, and came in with the same little precise steps, head inclined, hand outstretched, and with the same ingratiating smile that had been his wont thirty years before. He was hardly at all altered, and certainly looked no older, though he must then have been nearing seventy. Indeed I doubt if I had ever felt an old friend to be so exactly the same in every respect as he showed himself to be. The Premier of Bulgaria was in England ; he was proposing to bring him down to Cambridge, and would I advise him who should be invited to meet him. I told him what to do ; and he then talked very pleasantly and comfortably about the old days, with no touch of either complacency or regret ; and ended by a magnificent eulogy, uttered with great emphasis, of the virtues and fine qualities of the true Bulgarian stock, saying that he would be amply content with his performance if he could but persuade Great Britain of that. He had recently retired from his post, and was living, he told me, for most of the year, in a house in Ireland, I think on his paternal estate, and said how much delighted he was to be in



his old home again; and then smiling and bowing, with the little familiar gesture of his hand, somewhat stiffly made, he tripped away, as pleased as a child to be busy and important. I had never seen him more full of vitality and enthusiasm; yet only a few months later I heard the news of his sudden and unexpected death, on December 30, 1920. He was buried at his own express desire at the Bulgarian monastery of Rilo, where he had often retired for periods of quiet work.

But the permanent interest of the story does not lie so much in what Bouchier actually effected, considerable though the result was. It rather lies in the fact that a man whose gifts at first appeared to be of an entirely unpractical kind, and were more than counterbalanced by obvious disabilities, should have been enabled thus to triumph over circumstances and to achieve so marked a success. The view which was held of him, when he left Eton, was kindly and compassionate, but he was thought to be doomed to inevitable failure, and to be no one's enemy but his own. Yet he brought to pass results which many men of far more commanding character and tougher ambitions have wholly failed to realise; and all this was done modestly, without push or self-advertisement, by dint, not of vehemence or decisiveness, but through quick perception, generous sympathy, and ingenuousness rather than ingenuity. It is like the old fairy-story of the simple-minded younger brother, who succeeds by sheer simplicity where both the elder brothers, self-confident and unscrupulous men, have signally failed. The strange thing is that we should continue to over-value force and peremptoriness, when what they achieve is often so brief and



unsubstantial, and persistently decry the gentler and subtler qualities, because they are not so obviously impressive or effective ; yet such methods produce far more lasting results, and when all is over, it is they that

“ Smell sweet, and blossom in the dust.”









*Photo by J. Hunting.*

HOWARD OVERING STURGIS.

At Hinton Hall.

1906.



## XV

### HOWARD STURGIS

THE great advantage that the art of the portrait-painter possesses over that of the writer is that the painter can, with a few lines and colours, make a thrilling and moving presentment of a personality, while a dozen pages of the most carefully selected words often leave no distinct image or impression in the most sympathetic reader's mind ; and when one goes deeper, and longs to make a record of manner and demeanour, of mind and heart, the spoken or written word is the only possible medium—and even so an intolerably clumsy one. But one may try the experiment, even though the subtle, delicate, and evanescent figures that are most worth recording, and which one longs most to record, are far more difficult subjects than cruder, harsher, more salient personalities. It is a distressing fact that the nearer that any nature comes to perfect balance and beauty, the more difficult it is to give any notion of it. There is no record at all of the wise, tender-hearted, generous, universally adored Sir Christopher Wren, while the best biography in the world is that of the tyrannical and explosive Dr. Johnson.

I knew Howard Sturgis for about thirty years, in which time I learned to reverse every single opinion I first formed of him, except the most superficial



and external. I had heard him talked about almost disdainfully and irritably by people whom I rather reluctantly respected, and on the other hand he was spoken of so admiringly and yet so indefinitely by some whose critical judgment I relied upon, that I grew to think perversely that I should not like him, and still more definitely that he certainly would not like me. But circumstances indicated that I should inevitably meet him some time, and like the angelic pomp in Milton, "far off his coming shone."

Let me array first a few hard and tangible facts. His father, a man of great business capacity together with conspicuous personal attractiveness and social gifts, was a partner in Baring's Bank—the entertaining partner, I believe it is called. How he reached this financial altitude I do not know, but it began in 1849, after he had been for twenty years partner in a business house in China. He was an American by birth and had made his own way to success. He had married twice in America, and in Howard Sturgis's talk—Howard had a great clannish fidelity to everything in the shape of a relationship—there appeared the reflection of a host of cousins or half-cousins, bearing quaint and unrealisable names, and living in still quainter and more unimaginable localities, whose whims and peculiarities I got to know almost by heart. A third marriage followed, to a woman of great gifts and social charm, with a fund of deep and effective devotion and self-sacrifice. There were four children, Harry, who still lives, married to a daughter of George Meredith, a man of great gentleness and silent goodness, with a high position in the financial world. Then came Julian, long since dead, a graceful and charming writer of



novels, tales, comediettas, things beautifully and delicately perceived and phrased, but perhaps a little lacking in the sturdier and more substantial elements of imagination. Him I knew well ; and he appears to me as a man of singularly beautiful character, quick in perception, humorous, tolerant, and in the best sense of the word good-natured, though he never, it may be held, quite came to grips with life ; his home-circle was one of the most enchanting I have ever known, with a mutual affection diffused about it like a summer air. Next came Howard, born in 1855 ; and lastly a sister, May, of high social charm, who married first Colonel Hamilton Seymour, and secondly Sir Bertram Falle.

Mr. Sturgis *père* lived all the latter part of his life in England, with a house in Carlton House Terrace and a country house, first Mount Felix, near Walton-on-Thames, and afterwards Givons Grove near Leatherhead. One of his duties was to entertain for the firm clients and business allies, from America and the Continent, who visited England, and all this was done with prodigal and princely expenditure ; so that they had a large circle of friends and acquaintances and lived in the forefront of the social world.

Of Mr. Sturgis I know little, except that he was a very devoted father and husband, a hospitable man of infinite bonhomie and benevolence, handsome and accomplished ; but a few years before I knew Howard, he was attacked by an illness which caused sudden and dangerous seizures, lasting only for a short time and in no way affecting his mental powers or his aptitude for business, and yet causing those who were nearest to him great and constant anxiety. When he retired from the firm I do not know ; but he was very much



averse to any medical precautions being taken, and it ended by the whole burden and anxiety of this illness and its consequences being borne by Mrs. Sturgis and Howard, then the only son at home, in secrecy and silence, attempting to dissemble as far as possible the anguish of constant foreboding, for the sake of the husband and father to whom they were passionately devoted; their outer life going on as usual, with all its bustle of entertainment or engagement.

Howard himself had gone to Eton, to Miss Evans's house. His brother Julian, who was then still in the school, was a leading athlete and an extremely popular boy. But Howard was entirely different. He was clever, frail, sensitive, though with a high spirit of his own; he played no games, and was often ailing. But he formed a great friendship with his tutor, A. C. Ainger, which lasted through the lives of both—and both died within a few months of each other—and he also made friends with his brother's friends the Lytteltons, the Meysey-Thompsons, and other robust athletes. It used to be said in the house, to differentiate the habits of the three clans, that of the loaves provided for the boys' meals, the Lytteltons ate the crusts and threw the kneaded crumb at passers-by in the street, that the Meysey-Thompsons ate both crust and crumb, and that the Sturgises ate the crumb and put the crusts neatly on their plates.

Howard Sturgis left Eton rather early, owing to health, and went on eventually to Trinity, where he lived with a big Etonian set of students, athletes, and sporting men, and now achieved a high degree of popularity by his talk, his humour, his endless



good-nature, and his powers of mimicry. He was a well-known actor at the A.D.C., and a brilliant performer of female parts. He told me once that a rather serious and stern member of this set constituted himself a sort of friendly mentor, and endeavoured to correct the dangerous effects of popularity and esteem. After an evening spent in Howard's rooms by a number of the circle, at which Howard had given a full performance of his various impersonations, when the company faded away, the mentor remained sitting grimly in a chair ; and when they were left alone together, said to him, " Howard, you are fond of imitating people, and you do it a great deal, but you don't do it well " ; and the same critic inflicted an even severer blow when at a *marking* game, which they were fond of playing, when each member of the party marked his friends for specified qualities, such as good-humour, generosity, " use to me," and other characteristics, the mentor gave him 2 for conversation—the greatest blow to his self-esteem that he had ever publicly received !

He told me also that he had asked his father to give him a definite allowance, instead of a vague profusion of cheques, on the ground, he subtly said, that he might learn the value of money, and manage his own affairs. His father consented, and provided so excessively liberal an allowance, that Howard said he never breathed a syllable on the subject to any of his friends, for fear of seeming ostentatious, and also denied himself many reasonable indulgences for the same reason, while the allowance slowly accumulated in the bank.

He then went to live at home, and having a great gift for drawing and painting, studied at the Slade



School—and then his father's illness supervened, and he hardly dared leave home. His father died suddenly at last, and he devoted himself to his mother. They travelled together; and he told me that one of her fancies being never to sleep for two nights running in the same sheets, they carried with them in their mountainous baggage, many trunks containing linen sheets, which were used but once and then consigned to the laundry. But his mother's health failed, and she too died; he found himself left to face the world, with a large fortune, and many friends, but with the two human beings to whom he was entirely devoted, and for whom he had sacrificed every thought and wish of his own, taken suddenly from his side. Moreover, his health being weak, he had been not only the son of the house, but, so to speak, the daughter as well; and this had withdrawn him altogether from all participation in general society, country visits, and outdoor pursuits, and had substituted the life of the boudoir and the closed carriage.

But more than that, the strain had been of an agonising kind; day after day he had watched his father, fearing to see the signs of an approaching seizure; night after night he had spent in painful anticipation of being summoned to his father's assistance; and so it came about that the first time I ever saw him, he was almost in the condition of a nervous invalid, suffering from the long strain as well as from the shock of the double bereavement. He was not one who inflicted his melancholy moods and tremors upon his company; but he had at that time a look of exhaustion, a failure of physical power, and an irritability which made him very



unlike what he afterwards became. He was extremely brilliant and amusing in talk, and his charm was irresistible. But after my first meeting with him, I found my fears and suspicions confirmed. It was not only that he was surprisingly quick, incisive, and witty in talk ; he also seemed to me, in movement, manner, dress, and behaviour, to be a complete *mondain*, a thing which inspired me with terror and bewilderment ; but beside the definite signs of wealth and social supremacy, he appeared to trail behind him a host of influences, associations, and grandeurs, which emphasised for me my own comparatively sheltered and professional up-bringing ; and what a young man, brought suddenly in touch with a *haut ton* to which he is unused, fears and dreads, is not so much ignorance and inexperience as a suspicion of clumsiness and banality in his more lumpish and cautious handling of life. This first glimpse, however, of the personage, at once desirable and formidable, of whom I had heard so much, was a mere meteoric flash at an Eton dinner-party. A little while later, I was invited to a house where I afterwards spent some of the very happiest weeks and months of my life. Howard Sturgis and his former tutor, A. C. Ainger, had taken a lease of a beautiful house in North Wales near Portmadoc, Tan-yr-allt by name. That it was exquisitely and romantically beautiful is amply attested by the simple fact that the poet Shelley was once its tenant—for Shelley had the securest touch, even when wholly destitute of cash or expectations, in securing for himself homes of outstanding charm, where he proposed to stay *for ever*, and which he generally left, with rent and tradesmen's bills unpaid, in the course of a few



weeks. It was at Tan-yr-allt that the mysterious attempt was made upon Shelley's life, by a ruffian with a pistol, so Shelley said, who fired in at the library window. But as no conceivable reason could be alleged for the attempt, and as the bullets fired into the wainscot must have been fired from the interior of the room, it is almost certain that the affair was a figment of Shelley's imagination, and that the shots were fired by his own hand.

The house stood on a grassy platform high above the road, excavated out of the hill. Above it, the steep woods, with mossy rocks and falling streams, ran up to a strange and fantastic ridge of high-piled rocks, visible above the tree-tops. It commanded a beautiful view of plain and sea, of rugged heights and distant mountains. The house itself was a long low orange-tinted building, with a broad verandah and a terrace-walk in front of it. On one side there was a lawn shaded by great beech-trees; on the other side, a path led you past an old stable, to which was appended an open-air swimming-bath, fed by a stream from the hill, to a straggling orchard, in which stood the ruined shell of an even more substantial house—indeed it is not quite certain which of the two Shelley occupied. To the right rose a craggy hillfront, at the foot of which lay the little stone-built village of Tremadoc.

The house contained a drawing-room and dining-room, and a comfortable library well stocked with readable books, and there were a good many bedrooms above. The establishment was run by an old couple, the husband of whom, a friendly but caustic retainer, had been attached as a boy to Bishop Selwyn's Mission in Melanesia. He was a small, grey-bearded



man with blue eyes, and it was his habit, not out of discourtesy, I think, but from a vague sense of independence, never on any account to remove his black wideawake, not even when he was being interviewed in the library and receiving orders for the day. He had a pronounced and frequently enunciated contempt for Wales and everything Welsh, amply atoned for by his wife's excellent cooking and eager civility.

It was an ideal holiday house, and our hosts were endlessly hospitable. There used to be a perpetual flow of visitors through the house. Sometimes Ainger's two sisters presided, quiet, cultivated, and kindly women. Eton boys, Eton masters, friends of Howard Sturgis's, sometimes a big party, sometimes a small, but always harmonious. Ainger himself was an ideal host; he was a spare, distinguished-looking man with marked features, and an expression which in repose was somewhat grim and severe; but he had a beautiful illuminating smile, showing his big white teeth, and blue sparkling eyes. He was by no means a copious talker, but his silences were encouraging rather than disconcerting, and he was able to make one feel more instantly welcome and at home than most people. He had an epigrammatic turn, and among the boys had a reputation for sarcasm; but it was a very lambent irony at its worst, and gave its victim a sense of distinction rather than of effacement. What made the combination of the two so perfect was that Howard's own talk flowed unintermittently, without ever assuming the proportions of a soliloquy, and it included rather than excluded his listeners. It was so easy and unembarrassed, that only upon reflection did one perceive how brilliant it all was, in its quick fancy and delightful



humour ; and though he often talked of himself, his views and adventures, it all seemed rather a happy illustration of what was being said than a self-regarding confession. Moreover, his appreciation was so ready and eager—I can see now the little tattoo he used to beat upon the table as a kind of soft applause—and his answers so encouragingly provocative, that he seemed to radiate the sense not that he was the chief performer so much as the conductor of an accomplished and harmonious band.

Ainger had another great faculty as an entertainer, a delight in planning, decisively and exactly, the employments of each day. He was a real strategist in this respect. Everything worked out precisely as he designed it. Carriages turned up to the moment, exactly the right kind of ample luncheon was prepared, trains were caught, meals foreseeingly ordered in distant hotels. Then too he never packed too much into a day, making it like a bursting mosaic, nor did he forget to interpose between days of more strenuous exercise, times of recreative loafing. Up above the woodland crags of Tan-yr-allt was a wide plateau, with a reed-fringed moorland lake, and lonely hill-farms, all intersected by small lanes and farm-roads, and with a wide view of great mountain-heads and high ridges. I can see Ainger piloting along his miscellaneous caravan, knowing exactly when and why to call a halt, when to stride sternly and uncompromisingly ahead, when to stimulate flagging energies by a near prospect of tea and vehicles.

It is pleasant to remember winter evenings in the book-lined library—there was always a good



deal of silent reading going on in the house, in the interspaces of talk—or better still, the long idle mornings in the verandah with deck-chairs set out of the sun, and the summer-scented air blowing up from the wide valley with desultory talk flowing past, and the click of bowls upon the lawn. I must have stayed in the house thirty times at least, and hardly remember a single day of unhappiness there.

Howard Sturgis at first was not very often at Tan-yr-allt; but I shall never forget the first visit when I heard beforehand that he was to be fixedly and definitely of the party; and it was with a certain tremor that I faced the gathering. He was still to a certain extent overshadowed by his bereavements, and his physical strength was not great. He shunned longer expeditions, and sate much of the day out-of-doors. One of his pleasant tastes was for a kind of fine embroidery with silk upon a canvas ground. He used to say that it was no doubt thought an effeminate occupation; but he did not smoke to speak of, could not read or write continuously, and liked to have his fingers occupied while he talked; and so it became one of his most characteristic aspects to see him drawing out and matching his silks, or delicately inserting them; and it was a pleasure to watch his small, firm, expressive hands, and the little hampered gestures he made—for his quick and fanciful gestures were a real comment on his talk, growing out of it and not superimposed upon it. The first evening I remember he gave several of his deft *coups de patte* to unwary talkers—he liked to disconcert a blundering and persistent arguer, or to shock a conventional sense of propriety; though his delicate improprieties were tactfully calculated to give a prim mind rather



a sense of glorious tolerance at *not* being shocked than of any moral disapproval. But the next morning—I was late, I remember, and found all the party dispersed but Howard, who was sitting in the bow-window. I apologised for my belated appearance. “Why *shouldn't* you be late?” said Howard encouragingly; “after all your punctualities of Eton, it must be a blessed change!” We very soon agreed to adjourn to the verandah, and while he adjured me to consider my digestion, he himself seized triumphantly some rich cold scrap from the table, and eagerly devoured it, saying, “At all events, it’s no good my pretending I am not greedy!”

It was then, in that morning talk that followed, that I found a veil fall from my mind. I had thought of him as an almost superciliously civilised person, not vulgarly conscious of but insensibly fortified by and equipped with all the glittering and flashing panoply of the world and the pride of life. I was very needlessly frightened of the world in those days, believing that what were merely the convenient accessories of wealth and station were things jealously prized and dazzlingly flourished by their holders; for we ourselves had been shot from a very simple and reverential life into a kind of official prominence, and had not yet had time to get used to it all.

But instead of this, I found a man full of sympathy and affectionateness, really and fundamentally simple, valuing things and people on their own unassisted merits, and flatteringly curious about the differences of my own point-of-view. We talked on—what did we *not* talk about?—and though I was conscious of many limitations and timidities, I did not meet with any prejudices of that stubborn and sanctified



order that are the great bar to intimacy. That is the bourgeois attitude after all, to believe in the righteousness and permanence of one's preferences and prejudices and to be proud of them. But there was not a trace of this about Howard. I could see he had strong convictions of a kind, hatreds, disgusts, but neither meannesses nor animosities. How deep this went I had yet to learn—I did not for a long time gauge the strength, the loyalty, the infinite generosity of his spirit, and still less the depth of his tenderness, or his wonderful unselfishness, or his virile courage. These were still hidden from me by his almost feminine grace of manner, and his superficial dilettanteism.

He quoted against me a silly criticism of himself which I had made to Ainger. I had said that he seemed delightful, but that I felt there was a little creature just out of sight which might suddenly put its head out and bite. But he was not vexed by this, rather amused and even pleased, for he liked in a way to feel that he could make himself felt. I think in his earlier days of fragile health, shrinking sensitiveness, conscious ineffectiveness, he had been rather suppressed by his robust and popular brothers, not unkindly so much as thoughtlessly, and had passed through a stage of feeling himself to be of no particular account.

When he rose to go, he put his hand on my arm. "You won't be afraid of being *bitten* any more?" he said; and I had one of those startling and delightful shocks of wonder, at realising that this dazzling and amazing personage was prepared to tolerate me, to know me, even to make a friend of me. I said, "I can't promise not to be afraid of you—a sort of



fairy-prince ! ” He laughed and said, “ Oh, you will soon get over all that—you have got hold of quite a wrong idea ”—and then somehow the compact had been sealed. And then all that day, when we were with the others, his little glances and phrases gave me the sense of sharing a pleasant secret with him, a sense that I had somehow passed inside the fort, and was no longer listening at a closed and guarded door.

That evening, going down to dinner, I tapped at his door—he had a little bedroom, one of the least attractive rooms of the house, looking on to the bare rock-face out of which the platform had been carved, and along the damp and bare buff-plastered house-front—and found him finishing his toilet ; he was always the neatest, daintiest, freshest, least uncrumpled of people. He welcomed me with a little cry of pleasure : “ Is this your own idea ? ” “ Whose do you think it was ? ” “ Oh, I don’t know—I thought you said you were afraid.” He installed me in a chair, gave me a flower for my buttonhole, talked on. Yet it was not sentimental in the sense that it seemed like a weak effusion of fondness. He used to say that he was desperately sentimental, but the essence of sentimentality is that it believes itself to be something better ; and Howard enjoyed sentiment as he enjoyed his embroidery, as a pretty and harmless diversion, not in itself very important, and far removed from friendship, which was a much more serious affair.

This little visit, a few minutes before dinner, became a habitual ceremony ; and somehow I ceased to be a guest, and felt I had migrated into the inner circle of the household—the pleasantest thing that



can happen to one in a house where one is glad to be. And so the pleasant days went forward, and I made endless and agreeable discoveries about him.

Not long after this he determined to settle down. I should have thought that he would naturally have gone to London, for he was not dependent on country life in any way. Exercise did not suit him. He was one of those people with a great deal of vitality and nervous energy, and yet physically weak. Ainger used to be amiably stern about this, and say that if Howard would only take a ten-mile walk every day, we should soon hear the last of his ailments; it was true in the sense that a month of such a régime would have brought Howard to the grave; there were frequent occasions when, having been persuaded quite against his better judgment to join in some rather lengthy expedition, he was seized with faintness in the early stages of the walk, and obliged to be restored by rest and refreshment. Ainger was never ill—the man of iron, as we called him—and on the rare occasions when he had a bad cold or a headache, he moved and spoke like a man visibly under the shadow of doom. But Howard was constantly unwell, and never spoke of his ailments except to make light of them.

He eventually determined on settling in Windsor; it was within easy reach of town, near his friends the Eshers, and his many Eton acquaintances; and he took a long lease of a house near the Park—Queen's Acre, as it was called, pleasantly abbreviated to Qu'acre. It was a modern house in a large garden, with some tall elms at the farther end, and he made of the garden a beautiful place, with sheltered walks and rose-trellises and a blue-paved fountain-basin.



Then he added considerably to the house, building on a big long library, with bedrooms overhead and a spacious verandah, so that without being exactly stately, it was both comfortable and ample ; and it was furnished with no attempt at artistic ideals, but with much of the pleasant nondescript furniture of his old homes. It was certainly a most liveable house as administered by him—for one is apt to forget how entirely the attractiveness of a house is conditioned by the diffusion of a particular personality, and Howard had the gift of permeating and transfiguring his rooms. I have been in houses of which memory persists in emphasising the furniture and obliterating the hosts ; but of Qu'Acre the details are dim to me, and the only thing I remember sharply is the look and presence of Howard among his guests, for the simple reason that when he was present it was impossible, or so I found it, not to watch his gestures, his animated motions, and the rapid changes of emotion and amusement which passed swiftly and delightfully across his face, and to mark no less the transfiguration which he effected in so many of his guests.

Very soon he began to entertain largely—not formal parties ; but there were a good many old friends of his who had a general invitation to stay there, and as the years went on, his friendships multiplied. Then his American relations and friends were often in England ; and it was not a severely defined and mathematically ordered form of entertainment : he would have people there for weeks and even months at a stretch, who would feel that they were welcome all the time, and that their departure was regretted. Neither was it a fussy hospitality ; he did not arrange



expeditions or excursions. He kept a couple of old stout horses and a carriage, but they seldom left the stable except to go to the station. But the wonder was that he somehow kept these incongruous parties together, and made them of one mind, and the plans for the day were made on the spur of the moment. Strange visitors, some of them, relics of the old family circle ! My memory retains a few of them—an American friend with a copious flow of grammatical, even rhetorical talk, on matters wholly destitute of interest, and emphatic argument on questions of which the very premises were unknown, and all accompanied by an exaggerated and almost lascivious gallantry ; a tired and perennially discontented lady of unknown antecedents, except that she had been somebody's friend, whose monotonous and rather acrid voice incessantly recalled the image of a pen with a hair in it ; or an elderly gentleman of no known occupation, who set out a little table on folding-legs with gum, scissors, foot-rules, flannel-covered rollers, and sate snipping and pasting extracts from daily papers, on topics of attenuated interest, into a large volume which no human eye had been curious enough even to scrutinise. But these were the exceptions. It is true that Howard never dreamed of asking what are called interesting or prominent people for the sake of obtaining uncommon or exotic forms of talk—the basis of it all was simple friendliness or congeniality, or compassionate kindness, or sheer loyalty ; the claims admitted were those of the heart rather than of the head.

Henry James was a frequent visitor ; and there were few circles in which his wonderful expanding and accumulating talk was more successfully elicited,



or in which he paid more guileful deference to absurd persons whose dignity seemed to stand in need of instant reinstatement. And no one would have been more flatteringly surprised than he to have learned that his host was able not only to imitate the cadences of his voice, and the stammering evocation of the tortuous involution of his phrases, but to reproduce the very subtleties and refinements of his naturally intricate mind. Howard's brother-in-law, Colonel Seymour, himself an inimitable humorist, was a frequent guest, and would draw one aside in order to discuss admiringly, with nods and nudges and diplomatic suppression of names, what the precise mixture of qualities was which made Howard "the chosen friend, not only of serious politicians like Lord Esher, but of breezy athletes like the Lytteltons, and of professional moralists like . . . like [searching the circle for instances] . . . well, like our good friend Mr. Ainger."

And there in the middle of it all Howard would sit, doing his embroidery, using no arts, not drawing out his guest, or inviting contributions, or "putting people on to construe," so to speak, but letting all enjoy themselves in their own way, saying the sort of things that made people talk, holding inimitable conversations with his devoted but unpleasantly invalided dogs, in their separate baskets, relating his own grotesque and humiliating experiences, flicking over with a dexterous fillip a crude or vehement statement, or ironically dissecting a guest's temperament to his face, in a way which only left a sense of agreeable complacency. It seemed sometimes as if he had no reticences or reserves, and was ashamed of nothing except of being ashamed; but when you



reflected, he had said nothing egotistical or affected, nothing either wounding or humiliating.

But as he grew older and happier—his increasing happiness was very noticeable—he began to shrink from the perpetual strain and effort of all this festivity. He took into his house as a permanent inmate, to his great comfort and delight, a cousin of what the Scotch would describe as a reasonable degree of nearness, whose parents were much abroad. Willy Haynes-Smith, “the Babe,” as he was generally known, was a sturdy and unselfish youth—“brave and beneficent Mr. William,” as Henry James called him—uniformly cheerful and practical, who took off Howard’s hands much uncongenial business, and the complicated arrangements of the big household. Gradually the whole affair became quieter and simpler. The house was no longer overrun by vague guests, but the real intimates came oftener and stayed longer. There was a time when Howard began to wonder what the precise result of all this lavish expenditure of time and money and energy was. He must have confided his misgivings to Henry James, for in 1907 we find the latter writing to Howard, and imploring him to believe in his “admirable human use,” adding with fatherly wisdom, “don’t leave tatters of yourself on every bush that bristles with all the avidities and egotisms!”

At this time Howard was doing a good deal of writing. He had produced in the eighties a school story called *Tim*, which hardly does him justice, owing to its preponderance of sentiment. Then he wrote what is, I believe, his most characteristic and freshest book, in the form of letters, *All that was Possible*, of which the heroine, a discarded mistress,



entirely untainted by any grossness of experience, but a very free, spirited, and magnanimous nature, makes an attempt to live a perfectly natural and simple country life, only to discover her capacity for a wholesome and homely passion. It is rather a tragic little book, for Howard, in spite of all his gaiety and exuberant enjoyment of life, was inwardly a pessimist, in the sense that he knew only too well by experience the awful extremity of suffering inseparable from all deep and devoted affection.

Then he composed with infinite care and patience a big novel called *Belchamber*, which, in spite of its humour, its subtle analysis, its richly worked background, its professional excellence, is profoundly and almost morbidly sad in its tracing the cataclysm of a lonely and inexpressive nature, craving for affection, endowed with every dangerous advantage and with every capacity for pleasing except the power to please.

He wrote a few short stories as well ; but after *Belchamber*, which was hardly a conspicuous success, he wrote no more. He had not got the tenacity or the hardness of the artist. He had every gift which might have made a great writer, endless patience, a strong literary conscience, a rich vocabulary, minute observation, unfailing humour, passionate affections ; but he had not the imperative creative gift which makes a man the mouthpiece of something almost outside of himself ; and he was getting weary of life and of a world which beneath its sunlit surfaces held such dark and outrageous mysteries.

What, then, was the charm of his talk, which we may now assume to have been the ultimate artistic expression of himself, though it was in no way reserved for fit or select hearers, but lavished prodig-



gally on all alike ? In the first place he had a very quick verbal wit, and was, so to speak, a word-conjurer. This does not necessarily imply the larger sort of humour—indeed I have known conspicuous instances to the contrary—but it did so co-exist in Howard. Thus when someone quoted in his hearing the opening phrase of a supposed letter, “ Dear ——, Don’t laugh, but I am going to marry the Bishop of Sodor and Man,” Howard said, “ What an odd title, Sodor and Man—the exact opposite of the old eighteenth-century toast, ‘ Wine and Woman.’ ” But this sort of mental agility can easily be not far removed from dreariness, if diligently pursued ; and part of Howard’s charm was that he did not follow his own line, as even good talkers often do. It was always a real dialogue, and his best witticisms were generally too much *ad rem* to be detached from the talk in which they scintillated.

More penetrating still were his little characterisations of friends and acquaintances. Ainger, being seldom or never ill, was always extremely optimistic with regard to other people’s health. “ Yes,” said Howard meditatively, “ Arthur always maintains that there is never anything the matter with people till they die, and then it’s a happy release ! ” And I remember once when a colleague of mine and myself had written a rather improving little book of biographies of eminent and exemplary people, to be given as brief lectures, and could not devise a title—it ultimately appeared under the rather self-conscious name of *Men of Might*—we consulted Howard, describing the sort of book it was ; “ Why not call it *Livers and Lights* ? ” he said.

He was extraordinarily amusing in his accounts of



small social catastrophes, perilous situations, rebuffs and humiliations, such as he had himself sustained. He was, as I have said, an admirable mimic, and used in the course of the talk to slide half unconsciously into the tone and manner of certain people. "Yesterday," he said, "there were some people at tea, and forgetting that her brother was present, I said a few words and laughed in Miss E——'s most cooing manner. I looked up, and he was regarding me with eyes like gimlets. I can't tell you how I cleared my throat, and coughed, and talked in all sorts of grotesque tones—some of my guests thought I was having a *crise des nerfs*. But I threw him off the track, and now all I can do is to feel proud that my imitation was good enough to make him suspicious."

But these minute illustrations, characteristic as they may seem to those who knew Howard, hardly touch the root of the matter at all. They give or may give the impression that he was a sort of professional Merry-Andrew, merely on the look-out for verbal effects and absurd situations. It was not so at all. When he was with a big mixed company, he did as a rule overflow with the sort of talk that gives one an impression of easy conviviality at the time, and is never thought of again. But my own recollection of a *tête-à-tête* with him is rather that of a rapid modulation from mood to mood, and that he was often serious, though always with a light touch, sometimes rather bitterly in earnest, and often very sad. He felt things very deeply, the sorrows and troubles of friends, the unintelligible miseries of the world. There were no doubt people who thought him an elegant trifler and essentially light-minded, because he did not easily give himself away, and by a sort



of unconscious instinct plumbed the depth of the waters in which he was required to swim. He formed a very profound and just estimate of people, and nothing escaped him; he could distinguish, for instance, between outward imperturbability and inner hardness, between courtesy and sympathy, between candour and brutality. I would have accepted his judgment of other people more readily than that of most, because he had a power of loving what was essentially lovable, in spite of repellent and even repulsive superficial characteristics, and an immense tolerance for anything that was not wilfully spiteful or deliberately mean. He was in a way extremely critical, but he did not base his judgments upon mere prejudice, and had a real power of penetrating through disguises, whether they were conscious or unconscious. I think he was fundamentally both just and generous.

He was less easily bored than most people, because partly he was interested in mere varieties of character, and partly, as I have said, he was able *alere flammam*, and to evoke the best side of his companions. What I think he disliked was fundamental conventionality—the people who had no vital preference or views, but who blindly followed and obeyed a code, who wished to know the right people, and valued others according to the estimation they enjoyed. I do not remember Howard ever making up to an important person, or, what is a kind of inverted snobbishness, assuming that a person who is important must necessarily be dull. The only people whom, he used to confess, he found it difficult to resist were young Eton athletes in the full tide of early glamour and youthful success. He said laughingly that he was never able to overcome the unimaginable pride of being spoken to civilly by



a boy in "Pop." He had nephews in the school, and sons of friends, who used to go up to tea at Qu'acre on Sunday afternoons; but on the whole he was very rarely at Eton, though I remember occasionally his coming to one of Ainger's water-parties, his unaffected delight in the small incidents of the day, the sentiment of the river-reaches and the mirrored woods, and the delicious nonsense with which he beguiled the hours.

But he had a certain sense of fatality about his liveliest enjoyments—perhaps a Puritan<sup>1</sup> instinct, perhaps the penalty of reaction. He once spent a few days with me when I had a house in the Isle of Ely, and another old friend of us both joined us on the Sunday. I think he enjoyed very deeply a change of scene, and a rest from his monotonous life of entertainment—"I feel at times like the unctuous manager of a smart hotel," he said to me once. We had a very happy time, and talked over many things and people. When he went off to bed on Sunday night, he said to me, "I can't tell you how I have enjoyed this—so much indeed that I feel as if something tragic must be going to happen to me—quite 'fey' in fact." We came down to breakfast on Monday. There were letters for him and a telegram. He opened them, and with the pathetic look I had come to connect with his melancholy hours—wide-open eyes and lips unclosed—he handed me a letter and the telegram. It was a wretched and perplexing domestic tragedy of which I knew the details, which had suddenly culminated. But he had a great courage about such things, and met them, not indeed calmly, but with wonderful fairness—he had an intense respect for the liberty of choice—and perfect good sense.



He was always decidedly affected by personal comeliness, not sensuously but artistically, and I remember his once saying to me that he had desired the gift of beauty more than any gift in the world. The curious thing was that he always underrated his own personal attractiveness. He used to draw caricatures of himself, grotesque exaggerations of slight defects of figure and face. But his face and expression were to my mind, though not perhaps classically designed, almost more interesting and attractive than any face I knew, from the way in which his mood permeated and employed, so to speak, every part of his frame. He had in this the unconscious grace of the actor—unconscious, I say, because there was never the least affectation about it. The only occasions when he had a touch of almost undue deference was when he was feeling thoroughly shy, and clasped his hands imploringly and defensively upon his breast. But in a quiet talk every gesture and motion contributed to the central emphasis. Sometimes he would sit hunched up, staring disconsolately, sometimes he would turn suddenly round upon you, half-questioning, half-amused, but in all this there was never any slovenliness or abandonment; it was all under decorous control, except when his eyes would sometimes suddenly brim with tears, and his voice take on an almost moaning cadence. What remains is that he was one of the most expressive people I have ever seen, and it was into this, his talk, his eager and spontaneous sympathy, his critical appreciation, that all his artistic and creative impulse passed.

Howard was also among the best, so far as my own experience goes, of letter-writers, though I hardly



think they would be publishable letters, simply because they were so personal, and so intimately aimed at the matter in hand, whatever it was, with references and allusions that would probably be hardly intelligible except to his correspondent. They were full of shrewd, humorous, and tender sayings—but here again it was a question of Me and You.

The great letter-writers of the world—and I am not speaking of the letters which are interesting because of the achievements of the writer—are a small and select band, because a great deal of distinguishable quality is needed to make an evanescent and *ad hoc* thing like a letter into a literary performance; and yet how few people understand or would admit that there need be a performance at all! People will say, “We want frank and unadorned human nature”; but it is not possible for a human being even to betray, to say nothing of expressing, the nature that is in him, without a distinctly histrionic power and some underlying consciousness of a part publicly played. And then there must be deliberation about a letter, and an enjoyed flourish of emphatic phrases, and a certain unity of temperament and mood. All of these Howard had in a marked degree. He spent a considerable part of most days in writing letters, and they were to a great extent a continuance of his conversation—they stand the test of a good letter which Thackeray propounded, that the recipient should hear the voice of the writer as he peruses them. No doubt if Howard had aimed at writing letters that should be published, if he had copied letters, like J. A. Symonds, into a notebook, with space for corrections, interlineations, and additions, if he had addressed himself more to subjects of general



interest, like Gray, or indulged his irony like Ruskin, or described events of daily life, like Cowper, with abundant detail, or given the rein to his humour, like Charles Lamb, he could have excelled—indeed, *All that was Possible*, his book written in the form of letters, is a clear proof that he could have *composed* correspondence of sustained quality—but he did not; he took all this for granted, and just continued his *tête-à-tête* as if no one were by; and thus his letters, if printed, would be largely composed of hiatuses, with a considerable apparatus of footnotes. Yet he gave delight and sympathy and incidental admonition to many correspondents—“Your dear delicate signal,” as Henry James wrote.

No doubt if this study of mine should fall into the hands of a serious and practical person, it will be thought that there is a lamentable lack of organisation and settled purpose in the life I have described. “What share,” it may be said, “did such a man, with his beautiful needlework, his decrepit and purblind dogs, his little coterie of mutually admiring amateurs, his avoidance of publicities, actually *do* in the world? Where and in what was he ponderable or considerable?” It is difficult to give a statistical answer; and the replies to a legal cross-examination as to Howard’s precise occupation could at best be a confused murmur of sympathetic remonstrance and outcry. Yet the fact remains that to a large circle of people, many of them quite definitely practical, and some of these pre-eminently intellectual, Howard Sturgis was a fact, an influence of singular force and charm, and his character, after all due deduction, a thing of quite unique beauty and nobility. I feel myself, as many felt, that if there had arisen some unhappy crisis



in my affairs, some serious delinquency or entanglement, some urgent need of counsel and help, there was no one to whom I should more willingly and hopefully have gone for assistance. He was in the first place so generous in his recognition of difficulty, so wholly free from censoriousness, so little requiring to be assured of contrition and repentance, so free from any desire to extort conditions or pledges, that one would have needed none of the panoply of hypocrisy or excuse which more eminent practitioners of virtue often instinctively require. He would not have considered it necessary to consider into the state of the delinquent's soul, nor used the atmosphere of urgent dismay as a forcing-house for morality. "Neither do I condemn thee," he would have said, and addressed himself to the practical issue and to friendly reassurance. He would have felt that a man's standards and virtues were his own concern, and that an offender might learn virtue from misfortune, but could not possibly be incidentally taught it. He had no professed religion; he was a frank and virile agnostic; he had no views as to a future life, or any prolongation of human identity, because he had no evidence on such points, and could not transmute his desires into his beliefs, or dignify by the shadowy title of faith what he felt to be only the consecration of his inclinations. And yet he was full of principles and intuitions of a profound and noble order; his affections were unfathomable; his kindness was unfailing; honour, courage, sincerity, truthfulness, honesty, simple goodness—he had them in far greater abundance than most men. If to recognise duties that you *must* do, and faults that you *cannot* be guilty of, is a test of virtue, he



fulfilled it more than most men. He could be impatient and provocative with open adversaries—but he could not be either resentful or spiteful, cruel or over-bearing. He could forgive generously and forget decisively. He was incapable of meanness and scheming, and he had the secret of the love that pardons everything. He respected the liberties of others profoundly, and, though he criticised acutely, he seldom condemned. It may be said that these are luxuries which a man of wealth and position and numbers of attached friends could afford. But I never knew anyone so unconscious of his wealth and influence, and there was no one who could have lived more contentedly and light-heartedly on simple lines, if he had found it necessary to do so. It must be remembered, too, that he suffered a great deal, not only from physical malaise and nervous tension, but also acutely in the region of his affections and emotions.

For more than twenty years the Windsor life went on, and his happiness increased, he often said, year by year. He had reached a maturity of mind and an equanimity which was very different from the unrest of his youth. He had never nourished any particular ambitions, and he no longer desired even to assert himself. A tranquillity came into his face, even into his movements, which was very noticeable. His hair became snow-white at an early age, and this with his youthful face, clear eyes, and dark eyebrows, gave him a look of great distinction. He went away very seldom from home now, and occasionally travelled abroad; but though his health and spirits seemed equable enough, his physical strength declined. At last a definite ailment showed



itself, which eventually made an operation necessary, and there followed a series of operations which he bore with great patience and fortitude, but with a weariness and an indifference to life which seemed to betoken a real failure of vital power; but he made a slow and apparently sound recovery, and resumed to a certain extent his old way of life.

Then the Great War broke out; and this stirred his spirit to the depths. It was not only the personal aspect of it, though many of his friends were involved, and the children of friends, and he felt this deeply. But the whole catastrophe, the widespread misery and waste of it, the dreadful deluge of sorrow and despair overspreading the world, all brought him unspeakable anguish; and then too the thought that slow and fitful as the progress of the world was, even under peaceable conditions, in the direction of harmony and reason, the reckless abandonment of all this by a great nation crazed with pride and the appetite for domination, in favour of a policy of brutal spoliation and dastardly coercion—for he had no touch of the combative element in his peace-loving nature—together with the certainty that at best nothing could result from it but slaughter and devastation and the bankruptcy of warring nations—all this reduced him to a state of misery and horror that caused his friends deep distress and anxiety.

It was in the course of the first month of the war that I saw him for the last time. I went to Windsor for the inside of a day, and found him in the darkest depression, tearful, overstrained, in a state bordering on despair. I spent an afternoon with him; his affection and unselfishness came to the surface, and grievous as the occasion was, I felt more near to



him in his sadness than I had ever done before. It was all so unaffected and unashamed ; he could make no pretences either of indifference or vainglorious excitement ; the iron had entered his soul, and he did not disguise it. There followed a time of prolonged anxiety. If he had not been so pre-eminently sane and rational, I think that his reason might almost have given way ; yet, after all, it is only the finest spirits which can thus be overwhelmed by what was after all an impersonal sorrow for a world-wide tragedy.

He was very anxious if he could to do something to help, and it was eventually arranged that he should go to live in London, and take up some Red Cross work in a department formed to trace, as far as possible, the missing and the prisoners of war. It was a wise expedient, and his spirits somewhat revived ; day after day he went to his work—no easy matter for one in such delicate health—and made himself beloved by all who came into contact with him. His humour, his affection, his power of dealing with and entering into close sympathy with all sorts and varieties of temperament, gave him a very real position in the office. He had an extraordinary power of smoothing difficulties, of making irritable officials patient, and he was entrusted with all sorts of delicate negotiations and small diplomacies—"Go and see if Mr. Sturgis can do anything," was a phrase on the lips of many of his colleagues. This work brought him real happiness, and helped as nothing else could have done to restore the balance of his mind.

But in the course of 1918 his health failed suddenly and completely. The mischief, temporarily arrested



by his operations, broke out again, as anticipated by his doctors ; indeed, the marvel is that it had been possible for him to show such energy and activity as he had displayed. He faced the situation with amazing fortitude and equanimity, made friends with his nurses, found interest and amusement in the routine of the sick-room. He was still able to come down for a part of the day, and some of his intimate friends paid him long visits. He seemed, one of these told me, entirely placid and contented, facing the prospect of death not so much with disciplined fortitude as with easy indifference. By this time he knew that he had not long to live. His lifelong friend Ainger died in that year, and this gave him one less reason for living. I myself had broken down in health in 1917 and was seriously ill, away from home in much weakness and dejection for more than two years. He had written to me several times, and sent me messages of affection and encouragement. It was not till the end of 1918 that I even knew how ill he was. I wrote and suggested coming to see him, and he dictated a little characteristic reply full of tenderness, with a touch of the old irony, but said that he could only see two or three people now, and that the end was not far off. His weakness became extreme, and the tendance of his faithful friend and companion the Babe was a great support to him. But he hardly needed support, and mercifully suffered very little. And so he drifted slowly and quietly out to sea, with no fear or impatience, considerate, humorous, loving to the last, hoping nothing, expecting nothing, undisturbed by any doubt or regret, neither stoical nor querulous nor self-pitying, his own unaltered self to the end.









REGINALD JOHN SMITH.

Circa 1910.



## XVI

### REGINALD JOHN SMITH

WHEN I went as a boy of twelve to Eton in 1874, and entered College, having won a scholarship, I found myself a member of a very independent and self-contained community. We were seventy in number; we wore gowns in school and surplices in chapel. We dined in the great College Hall, a panelled Gothic place of much stateliness, with an open timbered roof and many portraits of distinguished men looking down on us. College was a school within a school. It had its own games, its own customs and traditions, and it was ruled by the Sixth Form, an oligarchy ten in number, who could fag, and punish, and even set lines; the Master in College, an elderly, amiable, and artistic man, presided benevolently, but he did not rule, and was not even consulted about minor discipline. He was a Constitutional Monarch, the Sixth Form being the Cabinet, and the Captain of the School the Premier.

The Sixth Form at that date happened to be mostly a very young lot. We Lower Boys lived in cubicles in the old Long Chamber, a vast room with deep-set windows, an open fireplace, and a huge, venerable oak table worn and furrowed with hard usage. The room opened into the Sixth Form passage, with a row on each side of small but very lofty rooms, each



with its own fire. We were summoned one evening to the Sixth Form supper-room, where the great men sat at their ease with cold meat, bread, beer and cheese before them. They seemed to me old men, as old as my father almost. We were chosen in turn as fags, and I fell to the lot of a genial boy, J. B. Chevallier, whose bath I filled, made his toast and tea, and did any odd jobs required.

But when we came back in January, there was a shift of fags, and I was transferred to the charge of Reginald Smith. I did not desire to change, though I felt vaguely flattered at being chosen by a boy who was higher up in the school. But from that moment he became a friend. He was endlessly good-natured. He told me I might work in his room, and I trespassed much upon his bonhomie. He would clear a space at his table, ask me what I was doing, help me over a difficult passage. Sometimes two or three Sixth-Form boys would come in, when I would listen open-eared to the easy gossip of the gods. Long Chamber was a noisy place, and it was delicious to escape into a quiet room with a good fire and an indulgent mentor. So much an established system was it, that I remember Reginald Smith doing me a Latin pentameter, into which I inadvertently introduced a false quantity. When my tutor underlined it, I said with injured innocence, "But, Sir, my fagmaster did that!" "Oh, indeed," said my tutor with a smile; "then give my compliments to your fagmaster and tell him that the *e* of 'senator' is short and not long!" I did not deliver the message till twenty years later.

One little incident I recollect most vividly. We used to cook our fagmasters' teas at a sort of common



oven, with iron plates, on which the boys' kettles were boiled. It was rumoured that the attendant did not clean them properly, so a boy, to test this, poured coffee one evening into all the kettles in order to note the result. That evening I poached two eggs for Reginald Smith. It was a dark room, the kitchen, and I was horrified to observe that the eggs when poached were of a rich brown colour. I carried the plate palpitating to my fagmaster's room. He took it from my hand and sat long regarding them. Then he looked up and said, " They look very odd ! I don't think I shall attempt these. You wouldn't like to eat them yourself ? " He held out the plate, and I took it away gratefully and devoured them, coffee-dyed integument and all. He never said a word of blame about it, except to ask me smilingly afterwards if they had agreed with me. But it entirely won my heart, and I am sure that no fag ever tried harder to serve a fagmaster well than I did after that evening.

He was then a tall, slim, smooth-faced fellow, with curly hair and I think small whiskers, which the older boys almost invariably grew. He was strong and active, but he had not the dexterity for games that brought athletic success. He was much liked for his modest and quiet friendliness and his entire simplicity and goodness of heart.

After I ceased to be his fag, he would always stop and say a pleasant word to me. He often reminded me in later years how my father came down to examine for the Newcastle Scholarship, asked to see him, and thanked him for his kindness to me. But I was on the occasion surprised to see my stately fagmaster a little shy and embarrassed in my father's presence,



when I had fully expected that it would be the other way.

He was a promising scholar, and won an Eton Scholarship at King's in 1875, passing on to Cambridge in 1876. When he left, he gave me his photograph and quite a number of pictures and small ornaments for my room. When he came down to Eton he used to pay me a call. But by the time that I went to Cambridge in 1881, he had gone to London to read for the Bar, and thus at Cambridge I only saw him on his occasional visits ; but the old friendly tie was always there.

His time at Cambridge was a very happy period for him ; at Eton, in spite of many friendships, his lack of athletic success had kept him somewhat in the background. But at Cambridge, his transparent simplicity and boundless goodwill, as well as his sound judgment and ability, were at once recognised. Before long, with all the generous admiration of a young man for a kindly and gifted senior, he had made close friends with Henry Bradshaw, the great librarian. But perhaps his greatest friend was the brilliant J. K. Stephen, who gave him the name, Jack Smith, by which he was then generally known.

J. K. Stephen was a young man of quite extraordinary brilliance and power. One sees the old days in a golden light, no doubt, but yet I do not think I ever heard talk of such range and quality as his ; he could be serious, dry, severely intellectual ; but he also had a sharp and keen-edged wit, together with a broad, fanciful, and quite irresponsible humour. He enjoyed almost more than strenuous discussion the society of appreciative, friendly, perceptive men, in whose company his talk could ebb and flow with



his restless mood. Reginald Smith was always the most generous of listeners ; he was never stirred to jealous competitiveness by good talk ; but he held his own, he kept the game going, he applauded delightedly ; and this always made him a particularly welcome companion to men whose humour flourished better in a sympathetic atmosphere than in a combative one. I have often heard J. K. Stephen speak about him and always with a deep regard. He valued not only his geniality and unaffectedness, but his peculiar faithfulness to a tie of friendship ; for this was indeed a special characteristic of Reginald Smith, that his friends felt so sure of him, and recognised that he was not only a good comrade, but a trusty champion of his friends' merits and qualities in all places and companies.

For a long time after that I held no particular communication with Reginald Smith. My only sight of him was on occasional visits he paid to Cambridge, and then later on when I was an Eton master, and he made a brief appearance. But some time in the late nineties, I think, when he had left the Bar to become a publisher, he attended a Founders' Day dinner at Eton, and at a reception afterwards I came upon him in a corner of the College Library. He greeted me with the greatest warmth ; and there it was, just the same as ever, the old semi-paternal, indulgent interest and sympathy. We talked of many things, and it was then that he suggested that I should send him a book for publication. But other plans intervened. I resigned my mastership at Eton in 1903, but stayed on there to work at the Windsor papers for a while ; and it must have been early in 1904 that I met him again at Eton, and he suggested laughingly that I



might have some impressions of a schoolmaster's life, of an informal kind, which might take shape in a book. The result was the *Upton Letters*. This book he scrutinised with the utmost care, and it was then that I really discovered the wonderful soundness of his judgment. He had a peculiar power of foreseeing contingencies in books, and a most tender regard for the feelings of others. I remember his saying, "This will give a false impression—it is out of tune with the book!" or he would say, "That portrait will be identified; rightly or wrongly it will hurt So-and-so; I would omit it or make it unrecognisable." I did omit a certain amount of the book in deference to his suggestions, and not only do I think he was right, but I am sure that he saved me from painful criticism. His delight in the success of the book was overflowing. That was another gift of his, that the praise of an author's work in which he was interested was not a mild satisfaction to him, but a visible and audible delight. The book was anonymous, but it "went." I had many curious communications about it, in which he used to revel. "That letter must be a real pleasure to you?" he would say—"at least I know it is a real pleasure to me." From time to time until the end I was in constant communication with him. How he found time to write so constantly and with such anxious care about the minutest details, I cannot say. He next admitted me to the *Cornhill*, and the series of papers took shape as the College Window. It was like him, when the book succeeded, to commission from Mr. Philip Norman a beautiful water-colour of the actual window which he sent me with eager delight.

As a publisher, he took endless personal pains. He



read, I imagine, most of the books submitted to him ; he made many suggestions. In particular cases he liked to fortify his own opinion by the opinion of a sympathetic judge, and I have examined a good many MSS. for him. What he aimed at securing was a solid sort of literature, with quality and distinction of style and wholesome tenderness of feeling—“ People like to have something to get their teeth into,” I have often heard him say. He did not like triviality or smartness, but catered for what is perhaps the most stable section of the reading public, not the sharply intellectual, not, as I have heard him say, quoting Lord Stowell, for the people who wanted “ mere novelties,” but for those who desired a sober, cultured atmosphere, with some tradition and continuity of aim, based upon a liberal simplicity and homely, chivalrous emotions. His unaffectedness saved him from conventionality and his common sense secured him against mere sentiment.

As an editor, he had a quite unique perception of the sort of thing which interested minds that were alert and perceptive without being exactly adventurous ; and to this he added a really remarkable instinct for variety and range. When he was at the Bar, he read largely and widely, and wrote many reviews. Later it might have been supposed that with his settled tastes—and I doubt if, after he became a publisher, he had ever had time or even inclination for desultory reading—he might have fallen into a groove ; but it was not so. Contrast and change were the notes of the *Cornhill*. He had at one time a small advisory committee, but I suspect that his own judgment was far superior to their collective judgment. Neither was he easily over-



ruled or over-persuaded. I was once in London for a short time, and he allowed me to assist him on the *Cornhill* by making a first selection among the innumerable MSS. which poured in. He never seemed to lay undue stress on the reputation of an author, or to publish for the sake of a name. Everything was considered on its merits, and with a view to an ingenious balancing of interests, of which he was hardly conscious. He did not give reasons for a choice ; he just seemed to feel what was required.

All these years I was constantly in his company ; we used to lunch at our club, talk about all sorts of matters—apart from literary schemes, he was always immensely interested in personal reminiscences, though not, I think, in mere gossip. Then we would adjourn to the office, a big first-floor room like a comfortable study looking out into Waterloo Place. There were many books about, and interesting sketches and pictures relating to some of the great personages, like Thackeray and the Brontës, in whom the house had a hereditary interest. He had generally some curious letter or memento to show me—I remember his delight at finding a letter of Thackeray's, who in his early days had made a hurried visit to France without either money or wraps, and had been lent both by a young clergyman on the boat. Thackeray's letter desired that the cloak should be returned and the money repaid ; and the young clergyman was my own grandfather, William Sidgwick.

The big table was always covered with papers ; but he had the gift of seeming entirely at leisure. He never hurried over a talk, he never seemed oppressed by work. Facts and figures were always instantly forthcoming. There he worked long and



late, and there I have been introduced to many memorable people ; one of the great joys of his life was the establishing these easy and frank relations with authors and authoresses ; and to this unembarrassed, unhurried talk he always sacrificed his own convenience, but never grudged it. It is pathetic to me that the last time I ever saw him was when I was passing through Waterloo Place in a taxi. I had missed an interview with him, owing to his having been unexpectedly detained. I leaned out, and just as I passed, the room was suddenly illuminated, and I saw him sitting in the well-known chair, bending over the heaped-up table, at his post.

I have dined with him at his hospitable house, where he was the most genial and self-effacing of hosts. He never wished to claim attention, but contrived to make his guests talk their best without any attempt to draw them out. He spoke very rarely of himself, while the genuineness of his interest in a companion removed all need of tact or diplomacy. I have been at his simple and comfortable little bungalow shooting-box. He was a very keen and untiring sportsman and an excellent shot. Never was anything more easy than the life. You shot or walked or sate and talked. He would take you to hospitable houses round about and had a pleasant word for all passers-by. Even there he had masses of letters ; but he was a rapid and decisive worker, and his business never overflowed into his leisure. Again I recollect being ill in London, undergoing medical treatment. He used to send his carriage for me to have a drive, drop interesting books for me to read, send me fruit and flowers, tempt me to do a bit of light work which he thought might distract me ;



and knowing that I was depressed and melancholy, he said that he would not bother me, but that if I wanted him he would come, or that I could invite myself to his house at any time, for any meal; and that he would invite any guest to see me. One incident is strongly in my mind, how in those dreary days I was wandering alone and distracted along a street, when he drove past. He descended in haste, and I could see that he was both shocked and concerned at my state. Would I care to drive with them, he asked, or would I like a companion for a walk? No? Yet he put some heart into me, I hardly know how; and his tender solicitude was like a precious balm.

I think that his two strongest qualities were his generosity of feeling and his loyalty. These were the pillars of his spirit. I remember once saying laughingly to him that if I were in sudden trouble, he was one of the two people I knew to whom I could write, say, for a thousand pounds, and add that I could not tell him why I wanted it, or how I should use it, or whether it would be repaid; and that I felt I should have had a cheque by return of post. I do not think I ever saw him more pleased. He gave me one of his kindest smiles, and said, "I like your saying that—you can't know how much I like your saying so." But this liberality was all entirely unostentatious. Again and again I have come on the track of something generous which he had done; and yet if he mentioned the incident, his own part in it was always untold. He would take endless trouble, even with people who had little claim on him, to unravel troublesome business, to put things straight, to get someone out of a difficulty, all as a matter of course; nor did he accompany it with



unpalatable reminders or prudent advice. Wise counsel he could give, but he never gave it unasked ; nor did he ever say " I told you so." He trusted the logic of events to speak for themselves. His own business was just to help if he could, and to ask for no recognition or gratitude.

His loyalty, again. For his school, his university, his old friends and teachers, his old-established business, his Church, his nation, and most of all for his home, he cherished a silent passion of duty and devotion. It was not a sentiment or a tender regard ; it was a faithfulness which called for service and sacrifice, if there was need. I used to poke a mild fun at times at him for his regard for quite inefficient and absurd people who were part of his past. " Oh yes, I know what you mean," he would say ; " but he is really a very well-meaning fellow—he is his own worst enemy." While if one said something cordial and laudatory of an old friend, he would say, " That's right ! I like to hear that ! " Again, I have seldom seen him manifest such pleasure as when I have told him pleasant and creditable things of men whom he had had cause to mistrust. " I'm glad you told me that ; I shall think very differently of him." But his judgment was clear and sometimes severe. He had no feeble sentimentality or universal tolerance. He hated meanness and spite and baseness with all his heart ; and yet he always preferred some counterbalancing instance of honour or good feeling. If a dog had a bad name, he never wanted to hang him ; he wanted a sound reason for believing him to be a good dog after all.

His tall, slender form with the big head, long, clear-cut features, pale complexion, and crisp, grizzled



hair, were always impressive. He preserved an indefinable look of youth both in face and movement to the end of his life. He had at first sight a certain gravity of air and a self-possessed, formal, decidedly stately manner, which I imagine made him seem formidable to a stranger. You would have said that he was a man who kept his own counsel, and was not afraid of making decisions. But this was instantly modified upon acquaintance by his pleasant smile and laugh, and a sort of eager, considerate courtesy extended to all alike. But I realise his personal impressiveness from the way in which, as I write, the look of his face with the frank, somewhat tired, eyes, and the tones and inflections of his resonant voice come back to me. What I was always conscious of was his entire absence of preoccupation or restlessness of mind; his look and his thought were bent upon you with an undivided attention; his talk was directed to you, and he gave his whole mind to the matter in hand. He had a peculiar tenacity of aim which held on its way without assertion or protestation. I remember that I once wrote a book and pressed it on his attention; he weighed it carefully, and in returning it, asked me to consider a variety of points; he did not refuse to publish the book, and he did full justice to it, but I became somehow aware that his opinion was not favourable. I put it aside, and long after, smilingly accused him of having held me back from publication. He gave me a friendly look and said, "Well, I don't think it would have added to your reputation." But it was all so gently done that I never had a sense of having been thwarted, only of having been guided. Indeed I think that there can hardly have been a



publisher who decided so firmly and never overstepped his own judgment, and who yet had so few disagreements with authors, and retained so firmly their affectionate respect and regard.

He had always a great sympathy with youth and ingenuousness and freshness of spirit. He used to quote Thackeray on the pleasure of visiting boys at school, going round the old scenes with them, with a dinner and a tip to follow. One of his few recreative delights was the music at the Temple Church, where his own memorial service was held. He was no musician ; but the beauty of the worship, the stately surroundings, the touch of old association with chapel services at Eton and King's, made an almost passionate appeal to his reverence and delight. And this had a larger side to it in the expectation of interest and sympathy with which he approached all men alike, and in his wonderful power of inspiring all who worked with him to do their best. It was all not a calculated attitude, it was just the quality of his own mind and temper taking shape. For indeed he seems to me to have been a perfect example of the good citizen, active in business, unflinching in purpose, disinterested in kindness, with strong and simple principles of character and life, decorous and considerate, a lover of the old order ; and at the same time courteous and high-minded, and entirely peaceable in word and deed. Strife and spite and ill-feeling were abhorrent to him. He kept his sense of duty for himself ; he was not censorious or interfering ; he would not easily suspect another man of any failure in duty, and it was no pleasure to him to indicate how another ought to behave.

He felt the outbreak of war very deeply. He was



intensely patriotic, and at a time when his staff was depleted, when he had many private anxieties and cares, he kept up his activities as a volunteer, as well as all his other interests. He could not spare his energies or his sacrifices at a time when the world was full of anxiety, labour, and loss. He had no taste for complaining, and self-pity was quite unknown to him. Sensitive as he was, he found deep and strong comfort in his home, and in that sacred companionship, it was evident to all who knew him, lay the real joy and inspiration of his life. So he continued, enduring, toiling, spending himself lavishly and bountifully in loyal and faithful service, up to the very end ; and his friends mourn in him a high-minded and chivalrous gentleman, faithful in duty, tender in affection, keeping an innocent spirit and a childlike heart unstained and undimmed.









CECIL SPRING-RICE.

In Fourth of June boating costume, as one of the crew of the "Alexandra."  
Circa 1876.



## XVII

### CECIL SPRING-RICE

#### I

THE other day I came across Sir Valentine Chirol's little book on Cecil Spring-Rice, which contains a dignified and erudite panegyric of the man, and an estimate of his diplomatic services—a record made none the less impressive by a deep and unobtrusive current of personal sympathy and admiration.

But it was with pain and astonishment that I saw the portrait attached as a frontispiece to the volume. I had not seen Spring-Rice for many years, and never knew him well, though we were boys in college at Eton together—he was three years my senior—and I had seen him at intervals, on his visits to England, and had several long and particularly interesting conversations with him.

But the portrait—and I have no reason to doubt its fidelity—is so different from my earlier and later recollections of him, that it gave me something of a shock: the big, domed forehead, the strong, prominent nose with the deep-cut lines to the ends of the mouth, the grizzled moustache and beard hiding the expressive lips, the tired eyes behind the strong gold-rimmed glasses—what a change was there! Then the firm, heavy-fingered hands, one of them holding a pipe, crossed over each other, and the



ambassadorial costume, scrupulous almost to dapper-ness—it all seemed so different. Had the picture been put before me without a name, I could never have recognised it; and indeed, scanning it closely, the only thing I can detect about it which links the new with the old is the serene and gentle glance of the eyes—there was some hint of remembrance there.

It was in 1876 at Eton, when I was fourteen, that I emerged from the rather rough-and-tumble life of Long Chamber, and was promoted to a little room of my own in the New Buildings on the Upper Passage. It was not an attractive room. If I had a son of my own, I should hate to think of his occupying it. It had a quarried window heavily barred—a modern fake; it had a buff paper, like a section of a sand-pit. It was very small, exiguously furnished, and warmed by hot-water pipes, which being made a receptacle for rubbish, rarely removed, sent out a stale and heavy smell. About ten feet from the window was the windowless back wall and the slated roof of a wing of the Provost's Lodge, so that I saw but a small slit of the sky; below was a dark, half-roofed alley, leading no whither, and in which no human form was ever visible. Yet I was ecstatically happy there!

Opposite mine, across the passage, was a room of the same size, but with this difference, that it looked out cheerfully and brightly to the west, over Weston's Yard. This room, I soon became aware, belonged to Spring-Rice, whom hitherto I just knew by sight. But the room attracted me deeply, though I did not venture to enter it, but surveyed its beauties through the open door.

I knew nothing in those days about taste, though



I had strong and ignorant prejudices about the shapes and colours of things, and was more attracted, no doubt, by the interest and curiousness of objects than by their beauty. Few boys in college at that time paid much heed to the adornment of their rooms. A kindly fagmaster perhaps, on leaving the school, gave one half a dozen nondescript pictures and hideous ornaments ; one's relations supplemented them by chromolithographs of landscapes, terracotta plaques painted with brigands in mutton-chop whiskers, or shapeless glass vases with milk-white panels ; one added perhaps a curtain of red and black lozenges of a pattern called "ecclesiastical" to screen one's box-bed and was content.

But this room of Spring-Rice's was strangely and exquisitely different. A few good pictures, some blue-and-white Oriental china, a Morris-patterned chintz curtain and easy-chair, an effective Persian rug. It all had the impress of a mind about it, a charm of selection and emphasis ; it had an intentional quality of its own.

And then the owner himself began to have a mysterious attractiveness too. He was not a tall boy, and still in jackets, with a big Eton collar, but he moved quickly and lightly with a decidedly abstracted air ; I can see him skimming fleetly into school, in tall hat and long-sleeved cloth gown (the official costume of Collegers), the sleeves flirting out behind him. His clothes well-worn but fitting him gracefully ; a strong muscular development, and every inch of it under control—he was a very promising football player, of remarkable speed and agility. I can even remember how his shapely hands, instead of bulging out awkwardly at the wrist, seemed to



continue with a certain delicacy the lines of his strong arms. He was pale in those days, with what might almost be called a morbidezza of complexion, and his hands unusually white. And then his features—the face stands out on the darkness as I write, pale, smooth-browed, the eyes at once fearless and gentle, the nose finely shaped, short upper lip, and the small lower lip, generally somewhat parted from the upper with a downward curl that gave a touch of fastidiousness, almost of scorn, to his expression, and a finely moulded chin. He wore his hair long, it tumbled over his brows, and he used to throw it back with an impatient gesture of the hand. My father had a number of Arundel pictures, and often turned them over with us at home; there was certainly an Italian touch about Spring-Rice's face in those days, both of outline and colouring, and I used again and again, in looking at the Arundels, to see something that reminded me of him in the face of a singing angel, or a Tuscan youth absorbed in his own pleasant solitary thoughts.

## II

A curious state of things prevailed in College at that time. There was a big set of boys not quite at the top of the school of quite remarkable intellectual promise, full of both ideas and ideals—J. K. Stephen, Charles Lowry (afterwards Headmaster of Tonbridge), W. O. Burrows (now Bishop of Chichester), Vassall (now Father Vassall-Phillips), M. T. Tatham, and others of kindred tastes and sympathies. My parents knew the parents of some of these boys and it was the custom at that time of upper boys who knew small boys “at home” to speak to them, ask them to



their rooms, as a refuge from the noise of Long Chamber, and generally befriend them. They were very good to me, like friendly elder brothers, and I got immense advantage out of the companionship. Spring-Rice was on the edge of this set, but he was not a sociable boy by any means. He preferred to read, write, and perhaps even to dream alone.

An added interest soon grew up. These boys brought out a school magazine, *The Etonian*, in which some of J. K. Stephen's earliest verses appeared. It was very unequal, but some of the pieces had a real and unusual literary quality.

To this magazine Spring-Rice contributed several pieces, unusually mature. One of these was called “The Friar and the Fairy: a Legend of St. Holias Damusalensis.” The fairy is a cold-hearted witch of surpassing loveliness, fatal to men. She sits enthroned among mountains.

“Beneath her star-embroidered veil  
Shone forth her cold blue eyes;  
Warm rain around her fell in hail,  
Tears changed to tearless sighs.”

Then the friar appears on the scene:

“But slowly up the valley toiled,  
With threadbare cloak all travel-soil'd—  
That Adam once had worn, and Eve'd  
Patched fifty times, so men believed;  
Yet proof against hell's hottest fire—  
A most dilapidated friar.”

The friar began his work, and preached a most uncompromising gospel, within earshot of the fairy:

“Far off, upon her azure throne,  
She ruled the lonely wastes alone;  
Her cold brow crowned with chilly lights,  
The icy Queen of icy heights



Heard thunder down the sounding dale,  
 And proudly pierce the misty veil,  
 And strike the desert peaks above,  
 The blessed words of peace and love.  
 Oh loud and long laughed she ; ' At length,  
 Pale friar, I measure strength with strength,'  
 And down the valley terribly  
 Back whirled her mighty melody :

' Echo, echo, resounding hills ;  
 Whisper in answer, eternal snow ;  
 Murmuring chant, my myriad rills,  
 Chant to the craven crowd below.

' Prate, poor pedants, of peace and love,  
 Beauty and virtue, if so ye will ;  
 Prate of predestined heaven above,  
 And the freed soul's purity—prate your fill.

' For the rocks will frown, and the rivulet flow,  
 And the strong rays redden the peaks above,  
 While man's cold corpse is rotting below,  
 With his vain, vain visions of peace and love.'

She sang, and rock and stream and tree  
 Caught up the mystic melody ;  
 From rugged peak and tender cloud,  
 A thousand voices echoed loud.

She sang, and smiled a bitter smile  
 With bitter curve of sneering lips ;  
 The aged mountains throbbed the while,  
 And ocean with his myriad ships."

The friar replies by a disdainful exorcism, and the  
 fairy is stricken dumb :

" He said, and all her awful grace,  
 Her mystic form and scornful face  
 Were slowly stiffened, cold and white  
 Upon the earth-disdaining height ;  
 Her eyes still gleaming passive hate,  
 She towered in solitary state ;  
 Uncaring she of weal or woe,  
 A pinnacle of ghastly snow."



And then with one of the sudden, somewhat mocking transitions, which were in early years decidedly characteristic of the writer, the poem ends :

“ A sharp attack of gout next year  
Cut short the blessed saint's career.”

This has always seemed to me a remarkable poem for a boy of sixteen. It is true that the cadences are those of Walter Scott and Tennyson, in that there is a touch of Victorian homeliness about it all ; but the young writer has a subject, and a sense of form ; and there are no poems in the magazine, except J. K. Stephen's, which show so clear a mastery, however unpractised, of literary form.

Then there comes a little later a still more remarkable poem, with the motto :

*“ Before the beginning of years  
There came to the making of man.”*

It is a portrait, sketched in mordant outlines, of a boy, a contemporary of Spring-Rice's ; and I must say that none of us had the smallest doubt as to who was intended, or of the veracity of the satire.

“ The World, the Flesh, the Devil once  
Agreed to patronise a dunce,  
And make his sorry dulness shine  
With splendid sparkle, half divine,  
' My gift is *trousers*,' lisped the World,  
As curlier yet his tail he curled,  
And neatly posing, half aloof,  
Scanned at his ease a blameless hoof ;  
' I give the mystic charm of dress,  
True sesame of nobleness. . . . '

“ Here ceased the courteous World ; and then  
The Flesh and Satan said, ' Amen.'  
Thereon the Flesh proceeded, ' This  
Shall constitute his perfect bliss,



To lose all life and power and sense  
 In undisturbed indolence.  
 Him shall no hot ambition fire,  
 No angry spur of hot desire  
 Shall goad his slow, reluctant soul  
 To race towards the distant goal.  
 The stroke of seven his only care,  
 His paradise an easy-chair ;  
 This gift, my friends, seems best to me,  
 Unbounded *vis inertiae*.' ”

The World pays profuse compliments to the Flesh :

“ ‘ But would His Majesty proceed ?  
 His gift would be a gift indeed ! ’  
 Thereon proceeded Satan. ‘ I  
 Could hardly hope to soar so high  
 Or such abysmal deeps descend  
 As can my soul-discerning friend.  
 But still I give, as Lord of lies,  
 That golden gift which all men prize,  
 The golden gift of courtesies. . . .

“ The power to analyse the heart,  
 Discern and weigh each feebler part ;  
 For him the most reserved shall prate,  
 For him each foible of the great,  
 Each grosser thought and mean delight,  
 Each silly love and petty spite,  
 Whatever’s vile and mean and low  
 Shall in his presence stronger grow.  
 Sin’s faithful friend and virtue’s foil,  
 Round every heart ’tis his to coil ;  
 With smoothest tongue and ready ear  
 To check or guide each hope and fear,  
 Alike the good and bad to turn  
 To his own purposes, and learn  
 The secrets of the human heart,  
 To better play his petty part.  
 This gift, this power seems best to me,  
 This heaven-corrupting courtesies,  
 Which heaven and hell alike can bless :  
 The golden gift of oiliness.’ ”



That is, I think, a really remarkable poem for a boy ; a boy generally writes under the stress of overpowering, crude, and uncritical emotion, or as though irreparably blasted by the fierce onset of life. But the above poem shows a power of penetrative realism, and an absence of illusions which generally comes only after long and devastating experience. There is no vagueness here, but a real subject, fearlessly surveyed and mercilessly dealt with.

The third contribution, signed with his initials, is a curious and no less mature piece of prose, entitled *Brown's Poem*. Brown is an unsuccessful poet, and the steps of his inspiration and execution, terminated as a rule by a profound coma, are described by his friend : " Brown always finds the divine art a mild and wholesome sedative—the most æsthetic of pursuits, best of anæsthetics." The two had been to church on the previous day and had seen two old men arm-in-arm enter together. Enquiries revealed that the two had been fellow-sinners, one a drunkard, the other a Methodist preacher. The former, overcome by drink, had been left asleep by a lighted fire. The preacher rushed back to save him ; the drunkard was blinded by the explosion, the preacher was unhurt. " The two friends continued their friendship : the one, perhaps, considerably more worthy ; the other, slightly less moral." It was this story that Brown had been attempting to versify, and had subsided into a lethargy more profound than usual.

It is a slight affair, of course ; but the whole conception, and still more the easy and restrained handling of it, are like that of a practised writer. Indeed, about all three pieces there is a sense of literary quality and a firm conception of what the writer is



aiming at, which, even though the execution is in places immature, is a very rare element to find in the work of so young a practitioner.

### III

This easy and daring handling of literature completed the fascination, and for a year or more I felt for Spring-Rice that speechless and adoring sense of hero-worship which is a natural and even inspiring stage in most imaginative boys.

But here is the curious thing, that though it was almost a species of devotion to watch my hero far-off, to meet him going to and fro, to sit near him, to hear him speak—he had a low, rapid, slightly husky utterance, the words very precisely enunciated, which I thought sate finely upon him, especially when in excited moments it rose into a more impassioned and clearer strain—though to see and hear him thus would communicate a thrill of pleasure to a whole day, I never attempted to attract his attention, or make his acquaintance, and never even exchanged a word with him during those years. It was very unadventurous, but it did not seem to be a thing to be hoped for, and much less schemed for. I told him long after with what a degree of admiration and worship I had surrounded him ; we laughed over it, and he was forced to confess that he was wholly unaware of my existence, except as a rather tousled, inoffensive boy who had a room opposite him.

But then the unexpected happened. My tutor had taken me to Henley in 1877 ; and after a morning in the hot sun, running with the Eton Eight, lunching heavily in a drag, I was seized with a headache so insupportable that I decided upon instant flight.



I went over the glaring bridge and down the little street by the river, found a special just starting, and ensconced myself in the corner of a carriage—my tutor had given me a return ticket—only thankful to escape out of the glare of the sun. I was alone in the carriage, and just as the train started, the door was opened, and Cecil Spring-Rice stepped lightly into the carriage. He came and sate down opposite me, smiled and nodded, and said, “We mustn’t let anyone suspect that we escaped—the heat is dreadful!” We talked on, and in two minutes he was telling me an Irish ghost story, how arrived at I forget, of which I can remember every smallest incident, and still more his absorbed look as he spoke, and the quick little gestures of his hands. We walked down to College together; my headache had disappeared, and I was in the seventh heaven of delight. Now, I thought, I shall see and talk to him occasionally. But it was not to be. He never spoke to me again for the rest of his time at Eton, and the only difference it made was that we nodded when we met.

But I did often hear him talk to others; and his talk was of a very singular type for a boy. He was neither emotional nor sentimental. He was petulant and argumentative, and had a sharp, rather trenchant tongue, with a good deal of personal satire at his command.

He was liked; but he was certainly feared. He was not in those days in the least gregarious. He deeply disliked any touch of coarseness or loudness or stupidity; and I should say that his humour was then of a distinctly derisive order. But he was felt to have a high standard, not that of a priggish moralist,



but that of a guarded and reserved nature, who felt deeply the sense of beauty in nature, literature and art, and had no desire to speak lightly or easily of things that were to him sacred and inviolable.

Yet I remember once in later years how in his company I attended a little meeting of boys who formed an Essay Society at Eton, and discussed a paper read by one of the members. He was asked to speak, and spoke, I recollect well, with great lightness and humour, but with a serious background to all he said, and how easily and gracefully he seemed to include his hearers in a circle of sympathy and unaffected goodwill.

But of all the later time I have not enough knowledge to speak. Yet I think it is worth while to set down an almost childish impression of him, as he appeared to a boy of fourteen, who was reaching out unconsciously after the signs of a certain mystery of beauty that permeated the world; and how his grace and charm, guarded and hidden as it was, penetrated and transfigured a younger mind and heart, under the elms and towers of Eton, nearly fifty years ago.









RUPERT BROOKE.  
Circa 1913.

*Emery Walker.*



## XVIII

### RUPERT BROOKE

THERE is a very real and unmistakable charm about the village of Grantchester, a mile or two away from Cambridge, though, as our beautiful English villages go, hardly an exceptional charm. But it may fairly be said that Rupert Brooke's graceful and moving lyric on the village does undoubtedly interpret in a very subtle and delicate way the shy and evasive beauty of the place, and invests it with an indefinable romantic quality.

You pass by an ancient church of homely dignity with an east window of intricate design and fine proportions, and a tower-clock always inclined to disregard its prescribed duties, at one time, indeed, permanently enlisted in the service of romance, and keeping only the time assigned to it in the poem. Behind it is an old manor-house comfortably imbedded in trees; and there the road turns at a sharp angle by a mossy wall of mouldering brick, and follows the line of the fosse of the Roman camp, which gives its name to the place, the *vallum* itself, with its southern aspect, being devoted to the benefit of a kitchen-garden; on the left are some trellised irregular houses, backed by a big orchard-close, once boasting a great walnut-tree; and then on the left,



a little lower down, is the old Vicarage, a house of ancient and sombre red-brick, recently sympathetically restored, now in the possession of the Brooke family, and famous as the place where the young poet used to lodge ; a big garden behind it, fringed by great chestnut-trees, runs down to the river. Here used to stand, in a straggling wilderness, a rockery of ecclesiastical fragments, and a ruinous building of clunch and tiles, designed as a garden-house, but with an excrescence like an apse, which gives it the air of having been intended in a rococo manner to present the external appearance of a chapel or oratory. If you pursue the main road, which zigzags with extraordinary pertinacity, you pass by a pleasant, tiled, orange-plastered house in an ample garden, and come out by Grantchester Mill, the road passing between the mill and the millpool.

This is not the mill made famous by Chaucer's somewhat unpleasant tale—the ruins of that are farther up the stream. The mill is a substantial modern structure of pale-yellow brick, high-shouldered and flour-dusted, with an airy, projecting pent-house, which swings down sacks of flour by a well-worn glittering chain ; and within, the mill keeps up its homely grumbling and groaning, while the stream spins and gurgles into the deep pool, floating off among green meadows and under high, dark-shadowing chestnuts into a wide and glimmering reach of speeding waters.

There lies the charm of Grantchester ; the mill-leat, parting from the river higher up, to join it lower down, embraces a broad islet, deep in meadow-grass, on either side of the dusty road ; all closed in by the towering elms and wildernesses of Trumpington Hall,



and the dark shadowy groves that brood over Byron's pool.

In a day of high summer you could hardly find a sweeter place ; all embowered in branching trees and close-set orchards ; the fowls picking up the fallen grain, the lazy anglers by the stream, the deep-brimmed pool with the breaking bubbles and the darting shoals of fish, the fragrant, fresh, weedy scent, and the distant clink of rowlocks over the golden-sprinkled grass—a scene for which in absence the thought might well ache, little knowing how deep into the heart had sunk its homely, dreaming charm.

I cannot claim to have known Rupert Brooke intimately ; but I knew him fairly well. He was often at my house, and I have preserved a few letters of his out of a larger number. When he died, I wrote down careful recollections of him in minute detail, hardly to be reproduced. But my impression of him is vivid and clear, which is indeed hardly to be wondered at, for he was very unlike other people. His charm, his enjoyment of life, his great personal beauty, the imperishable quality of some few of his poems, and the strange and tragic suddenness of his death have combined to create a sort of legend about him, and to invest him with a mysterious sanctity which would both have amazed and amused him, and would have ended, I think, by vexing him. For he has become not a very animated and actual human being, as he emphatically was, but a figure like *Linus* or *Hylas* or *Lycidas*, loved well and lamented, crowned with the unfading wreath of art, illuminated by the sunshine of life, and solemnised by the shadows of untimely death.

Yet at the same time it may be truly said that the



very existence of this legend, with its enfolding rarity, is of itself abundant testimony to the high and abiding quality both of his charm and of his work. It is only figures distinguished by pre-eminent loveliness and by romantic unity that awake so vivid an admiration and leave behind them so passionate a regret. All down the ages there stand out personalities, such as, to name but two modern instances, John Stirling and Arthur Hallam, whom their contemporaries seem to have almost despaired of fitly commemorating. No oblivion can engulf their peculiar grace and loveliness, and I would by no means minimise it. I would only desire to record my own impression of an almost startlingly attractive character, seen but in brief glimpses and at long intervals.

My first audible consciousness of Rupert Brooke came from an enthusiastic undergraduate, a member of his and my old college, who talked to me about him with generous and overwhelming enthusiasm, and indeed had made it his business to collect Rupert's fugitive verses. On a later occasion he brought me a packet of these to see ; and I must own that I did not think them more than greatly promising—conventional in their deliberate modernity, uneven in workmanship, extravagant and even bizarre in emphasis, and with little continuity or serenity either in style or thought. Still, I could see that there must be something very surprising and striking about a youth who evidently excited such passionate interest among his contemporaries.

And then I met him, in the rooms of another undergraduate, a pupil of my own. He strolled in very late, when we had almost ceased to expect him. He



was far more striking in appearance than exactly handsome in outline. His eyes were small or deeply set, his features healthily rounded, his lips frank and expressive. It was the colouring of face and hair which gave a special character to his look. The hair rose very thickly from his forehead, and fell in rather stiff arched locks on either side—he grew it full and over-long ; it was of a beautiful dark auburn tint inclining to red, but with an underlying golden gleam in it. His complexion was richly coloured, as though the blood were plentiful and near the surface ; his face much tanned, with the tinge of a sun-ripened fruit. He was strongly built, but inclined to be sturdy, and even clumsy, rather than graceful or lithe ; his feet and hands were somewhat large, and set stiffly on their joints ; the latter had no expressiveness or grace, and his feet were roughly proportioned and homely. Nor did he sit or move with any suppleness, but lounged, rather huddled, in his chair ; while, though his glance and regard were frank and friendly, his voice was far from beautiful, monotonous in tone, husky and somewhat hampered in his throat.

Twice I think I saw him on the stage, both times reciting some prologue or other. In one he appeared as a Greek god, Hermes perhaps, or Apollo. He seemed wholly without nervousness, though scantily clad in some sort of a red tunic, with arms, neck, and legs bare. He monotoned his part without any flexibility ; and I remember a repeated motion of his arms, which was not without beauty, but became wearisome, partly through mere iteration, but partly too because it suggested a deliberately conceived gesture, made without reference to what was being declaimed, and with a view to a studied effect. He



made a fine statuesque figure as he stood there ; but though dignified and self-possessed, I thought him curiously lacking in dramatic sympathy or power of expression.

In the other part I seem to recollect him as shrouded in a black garment suggesting a monastic calling—but in what capacity he so appeared I find it difficult to imagine.

Until he had taken his degree I saw him no more, but often heard about him ; he was undoubtedly the subject of much interest and speculation. He was thought to have a real critical gift in English literature, and considerable erudition. But he was impatient of collegiate restraint, and lived mostly at Grantchester, with one or two companions, working hard, bathing frequently, and exploring the pastoral country all round on foot or with a bicycle.

Then it came about that a friend of his and mine was staying with me, and I asked Rupert to dinner. He came quite readily and spent a long evening with us. I do not think that he talked very much ; and indeed neither then nor at any other time do I remember his saying anything markedly memorable, either by way of epigram or paradox or flight of fancy. He just joined in the talk in a good-humoured, lively, and companionable way, was perfectly simple and unaffected ; and when he went away, we agreed that he was not in the smallest degree spoilt by all the attention and adoration which he received, but was living a tough and enthusiastic life of his own, with strong preferences, without any pose or self-consciousness ; if he had any ecstasies, he kept them to himself, and he had no touch of intenseness or affectation.

After this I came to know him decidedly better.



We fell into a sort of understanding that he should send me a line, whenever he felt disposed, saying that he was at or near Cambridge, and disengaged, and that he would come and dine with me. On one occasion I recollect that he came dressed in a coal-black flannel shirt, with a bright red tie and a suit of grey homespun. This carefully calculated costume did not convey any sense of affectation, though it undoubtedly threw up the fine colouring of his head into strong relief.

At one time I remember him suffering from a severe nervous shock. He had been overworking; and the sudden death of his father, combined with the necessity of helping to run the Rugby boarding-house, which his father had held, proved too great a strain. He had some sort of attack, which warned him of the possibility of serious mischief, and he determined to go off to California. I do not know what the symptoms were, but he suffered from fits of depression, and, I thought, appeared to find it a considerable relief to discuss his case freely, and to be much reassured, by what I was able to tell him from my own experience, that it was possible by rational precautions and habits to throw off the ill-effects of such a strain completely. He talked that evening with occasional animation, interspersed with moods of depression. I felt him to be oppressed by a great weariness of the life he had been living, and of a strong desire for a complete change of scene. He said that his mind had become "stuffy and unreliable"; he had no reluctance to going off alone, nor did he crave for any familiar companionship. I enquired about this, and he said that he found it easy to make friends, and enjoyed the idea of meeting



strangers, who would take him just as he was, without any knowledge of his tastes or antecedents. I felt him to be entirely adventurous in this ; but the prevailing feeling was that he wanted to break with his previous life a little, get a current of new thoughts and images, and obliterate by all possible means something which seemed almost like an obsession ; for he spoke of his trouble very seriously, and even with a sort of terror, as if he had for the first time realised that there might be onsets which he could not resist, and wounds which he could not cure. He said gravely that he had made unpleasant discoveries about his constitution, and that it was not so immune, when confronted with a strain, as he had imagined.

There followed other evenings which I do not precisely distinguish. We dined together, and talked vaguely and discursively about books and literary matters. I do not remember that his criticisms were ever very forcible, though extremely appreciative ; he enjoyed a humorous tale, and there was no sense about him of packed intellectuality or professional dryness. His studies had lain mainly in Elizabethan drama, of which I knew less than nothing. He did not persist in recurring to it, but his chief interest lay in literary personalities. He was very easily pleased, and preferred that the talk should wander where it would.

Later still, when he had got his Fellowship at King's, I sounded him, on the suggestion of Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, about his willingness to do some English teaching at Cambridge.

He took to the idea very readily, and we talked it out in some detail. He said frankly that he had no intention of making teaching the business of his life ;



but he was obviously attracted by the project. This was just at the beginning of the war, and it was the last time I saw him; he spoke of his intention of joining the forces in some capacity or other without delay.

Of course I only saw one particular side of him, nor did he show me freely what was in his mind. One heard of him as enjoying all kinds of sociability, equably and not restlessly, and indeed rather indiscriminately, welcoming all kinds of ideas, every variety of acquaintance. Many people desired his company, and would have liked to impound and monopolise him; but he had no taste for a coterie, and enjoyed freedom and variety. It was freely admitted that he took an almost childlike delight in admiration and applause, even when it was not the best sort of applause, or from the right kind of people. But it simply amused him and he neither craved for it nor depended upon it. He was obviously neither egotistical nor even self-absorbed, and he had no deliberate desire to create an impression. He loved equal and tranquil companionship, and he was ready to take people as they came along.

It was a great delight to find him always so responsive and friendly. He did not talk about himself, except in reply to direct questions, and he engaged in any talk that was going forward with a sense of relish and zest; but he did not scintillate, or enunciate fine or even startling sentiments; and his judgment of the temperaments and characters of others seemed to me guileless rather than analytical.

He used often to say when he left me that he would write me a letter, but he did not often carry out this intention; but I have half a dozen of his letters,



very frank and simple documents. He says, for instance, that in America he had found himself "merely a receptive organism," though he had "managed to grind out a few ramshackle articles." Anything less pompous or self-regarding than these letters can hardly be conceived. His last letter to me was written on August 25, 1914, and is almost wholly concerned with suggestions of what could be done to help certain friends of his, writers and literary men, whom the war had almost wholly deprived of occupation and resources. "I might have been giving some [lectures] next term," he says. "As it is, I shall be employed in sterner affairs, I hope."

As to his poetry, beautiful and moving as some of his later work is, I do not think that as a whole it can be regarded, with a few exceptions, as supremely poetical. Some of the sonnets appear to me to be profoundly beautiful; the epilogue to Grantchester is full of charm, but it is an improvisation. "The Fish" is a striking poem, but an almost over-elaborate word-study. Some of the poems are undeniably ugly, and there is visible in some of them a tendency which is not so much realistic as *macabre*, a desire to delineate images of pure horror and disgust. Some of the love-poems are even over-voluptuous, not the work of a supreme interpreter of beauty, so much as the expression of one whose interest and delight in life overflowed in poetry.

Tennyson said of Swinburne that he was a reed through which all the winds blew into music. This could not be said in an unqualified way of Rupert Brooke. He was intensely interested in life, both physically and emotionally, and he had a huge faculty of indiscriminating enjoyment; but I do not per-



ceive the absolute consecration of his powers to poetry which is characteristic of the greatest poets. He seemed to me to be rather feeling about for some mode of expression, and his poetry was the temporary result of this. He had a very great literary gift, and when the mood came, could give it full and beautiful expression; but I doubt if his life would have been dedicated to poetry.

He joined in the war from an irresistible sense of adventure, and with a desire to share in a great and poignant experience, not reluctantly nor with a sense of conscious self-sacrifice. Of course there was a side of life that he loved intensely, the unrestrained, solitary, musing side, with its equally welcomed interludes of friendship, talk, and laughter. But I believe he felt that the war was a great and obvious opportunity of reaching out still further and deeper into life, and he took it exultantly, without looking back. I believe he would have passionately disliked to have been thought to be making a conscious holocaust of great powers and faculties, or rather that, though he might have valued such approval, yet it was not in any degree or sense a motive. To serve his country was to him rather as a door flung open, through which he marched courageous and wide-eyed, desirous to see what would meet his gaze.

His death was a tragic loss, because he was so vital a lover of life, and would have much enriched it both by his gifts and his joyful companionship. But he would have wished to be remembered most of all as a true friend and comrade, and to be credited with a noble sort of curiosity as to all that life might bring him, even though the gift that was placed in his eager hand was the gift of death.



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